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POLITICS IN CONRAD'S MAJOR FICTION

BY

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T.A. Law

Abstract of Thesis

As its title suggests, this thesis is concerned with the role of politics in Joseph Conrad's major fiction. It is not, however, an attempt to use the novels as a guide to Conrad's politics, but rather the reverse. To this end, the thesis is conceived around two principal aims. First, to establish what kinds of political issues Conrad explores in his fiction. Second, to determine, where possible, the ways in which Conrad's political views and predilections affect the quality of the works.

The thesis is divided into five major chapters and deals with four of Conrad's works. The first chapter discusses 'Heart of Darkness' and argues that it establishes fundamental principles about the natures of civilisation, man and reality. The following two chapters deal with the novel Nostromo. The first reviews the critical response to the novel. In the second, I argue that the novel is not simply about materialism or imperialism, but that it is a work which explores fundamental social and political issues, amongst them the natures of historical development, of institutions, of leadership and of ideologies. The fourth chapter concentrates on The Secret Agent and argues that it is a serious attempt to dramatize particular forms of anarchism in a particular type of human society. Under Western Eyes is the subject of the final chapter which argues that Conrad's attack on Russian mysticism, in the last of his great political novels, is balanced by his vision of Western failings and limitations.

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Introduction

What is a political novel? Irving Howe claims (amongst other things), that the criterion for deciding what is and what is not a political novel should be whether or not one wishes to treat it as such (1). In other words, the question is one of perspective rather than classification. Is it useful to treat a given work as a political novel? Does such an approach help us to understand or appreciate the work in hand? These are the sorts of questions which Howe thinks we need to answer. I can best illustrate what he is getting at by referring to Orwell's Animal Farm. Ostensibly, it is a fantasy about talking animals who take over a farm. We all know, however, that it is in fact an allegory about the Russian revolution and its failures. We treat it as a political tale, but if we did not it would remain a fantasy about farmyard animals. Clearly it is a question of approach, of perspective. Not all novels, however, are allegorical. Some treat politics directly (and manifestly so), for example, Wells's The New Machiavelli: we all know that it is political because it has a politician for its central character. There is hardly likely to be any argument over these two examples; they both deal with recognizable events or periods in political history, and they are therefore "political novels". There is, however, another species of political novel which is less easily defined, or indeed established as such: the novel which deals with political ideas, or centres around political assumptions. In order even to recognize such a novel when we see it, we will need to decide what we mean by politics.

Politics ... is a millstone hung on the neck of literature: within six months it will drag it to the bottom. Politics in the midst of imaginative activity is like a pistol shot in the middle of a concert. The noise is shattering without being forceful. (2)

In such a manner did Stendhal lament that he had to include some "politics" in his novel Red and Black. His interpretation of politics, however, seems to me to be not only unnecessarily narrow, but also akin to fantasy. For him, to judge by the content of Red and Black itself, politics is merely grubby intrigue: plots, counter-plots and conspiracies. He writes as if politics has nothing to do with ordinary people and can be treated as an entirely separate and clearly defined area of human activity. But above all, he does not take politics seriously - which is why it is not worth treating Red and Black as a political novel. His definition of politics, however, as somehow a fringe activity - something we could all do without - is evidently shared by many literary critics, and amongst them many who have been interested enough in Conrad to write about his work. Even when dealing with novels like Under Western Eyes, such critics are apt to remark that they are not "really" about politics (3). I suspect that what they in fact mean is that they themselves are not interested in politics. But clearly the danger of their approach is that it could mislead the rest of us into thinking that Conrad is not interested in politics, and that is emphatically not the case. Moreover, the definition of politics to which they adhere is so different from Conrad's own that it must necessarily prevent them from understanding a good part of his purpose, and indeed his art.

Let us consider briefly the legacy of the Warsaw uprising of 1863. How it affected the young Conrad is a matter of

debate for biographers and certainly not for this thesis. There are, however, two obvious points to be considered. First, the events of ~~that year~~ were of national importance. Second, they were of personal significance. For his part in the rebellion against Russian rule, Apollo Korzeniowski, Conrad's father, was tried and exiled with his wife and only son. Thus the politics of Poland were an integral part of Conrad's personal life. If he could scorn them, he could not disregard them; and indelibly stamped on his mind must have been the inextricable nature of the knot that ties the individual to his community. There can have been nothing peripheral about political action for a man with Conrad's heritage, and it is easy to see how that heritage could draw his fiction inexorably to it.

Obviously not all of Conrad's work is inclined towards political questions, for to say that he was interested is not to say that he was obsessed. In the chapters which follow, therefore, I concentrate my attention on the three overtly political novels, Nostromo, The Secret Agent, and Under Western Eyes, and on the tale 'Heart of Darkness' which I think contains the philosophical underpinnings or assumptions which lie behind his political convictions. Each of these texts reflect what I think is a very consistent view of man and society, which is that they are bound together in fundamental and inseparable ways; that the life of the individual is crucially affected by the social and political processes taking place around him. Conrad's own vision of humanity places political activity and ideas at the very centre of human experience. And if we fail to grasp that, then we also fail to appreciate the unity and coherence of the vision which

inspired his best work. This is not to say that the novels which lie outside of that vision, such as The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and Lord Jim are not worthy creations but merely that they do not have the same intensity of political interest as the four texts I have chosen to study. Each, in its way, also affirms the importance of the community in the life of the individual, but they lack the sophistication of the later works.

The first priority of this thesis must be to isolate and define Conrad's political vision. But it must also concern itself with evaluating the impact on the fiction of what, without wishing to appear vulgar, I might call 'gut politics'. I refer, of course, to the simple prejudices of a Nałecz (4), which have little in common with his powerful political imagination and sometimes even run contrary to it. I suspect that the failure to make this distinction between the sophisticated and the plebeian in Conrad is responsible for much of the confusion which has surrounded his political novels. Those critics who are hostile to the politics in them - I think, for example, of Irving Howe and Michael Wilding (5) - have been so incensed by the vulgar political sentiments which have inevitably crept in, that they have been blind to the subtlety and power of the political vision itself. Despite the temptation to crude mud-slinging, Conrad succeeds in dramatizing in these novels a sophisticated political nightmare, distinguished particularly by the way it blends the shades of grey and black into a panoply of misery and despair. It is a vision conscientiously worked at and carefully crafted. And we cannot hope to do it justice unless we are prepared to give it the same serious attention as Conrad accorded to the writing of the novels which brought

that vision to us.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Irving Howe, Politics and the Novel (1957), New York, Chap. 1.
2. Stendhal, Red and Black (1969), New York, p.304.
3. This extraordinary comment is quite common. A good example can be found in Frederick R. Karl, "The Rise and Fall of Under Western Eyes", which appeared in Nineteenth Century Fiction in March 1959: "...one errs if one thinks Conrad's fiction is concerned with politics in the usual sense...he was interested more in man's social role than in his relation to the state." His "usual sense" of politics is not altogether unusual, but if what Mikulin, General T- and Razumov do can be explained as merely a "social role" (presumably as distinct from a political role), it is difficult to see how it is possible to write about the state at all.
4. Nałecz was part of Conrad's family title and signified that he belonged to the Szlachta or Polish nobility. Whilst hardly noble on the scale of West European aristocracy, the Szlachta was an ancient group who constituted the hereditary ruling class of Poland since feudal times. See Ian Watt, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century (1979), Los Angeles, pp. 1-2.
5. Howe, op.cit., and Michael Wilding, "The Politics of Nostromo", in Essays in Criticism, XVI (October 1966). I shall be addressing myself to their arguments in due course.

CHAPTER ONE

'Heart of Darkness': A Philosophical Bedrock

I

To judge by the responses of many critics, the study of Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' can be an exercise not entirely dissimilar from trying to make out the details of an admittedly large object in poor light and surrounded by dense fog. We know that there is something there but we are unsure of precisely what it is. Indeed the essential meaning of the work and its significance amongst the whole of the Conrad oeuvre seem at times to be so bafflingly elusive that one might be forgiven for supposing that they do not exist at all. It would be foolish, therefore, to deny that the work does not suffer, and at crucial moments in the narrative too, from a dire shortage of that sort of specific detail which serves to fully illuminate. There are no shortages of signposts in the tale but they all seem to lead us back to ambiguities and ambivalences. On the other hand, such ambiguities are responsible for much, if not all, of the interest which the tale provokes. Much is explained, however, if we consider that in the context of Conrad's other major works 'Heart of Darkness' represents what amounts to an experiment in technique, elements of which appear elsewhere but not with the same degree of intensity. I refer, of course, to Conrad's intensive and, perhaps, over-indulged use of symbol and allegory.

According to Frederick Karl, Conrad himself "derogated" 'Heart of Darkness' as "too symbolic" (1), and although such a technique produces a remarkable economy of style, it inevitably lays itself open to several important criticisms. Not the least of these is that characters in fiction need to be presented so that we can recognize them as potentially real or authentic human beings. In 'Heart of Darkness', for

example, Kurtz hardly fulfills Conrad's empty boast that his characters would "bleed to a prick" (2); he is a shadow, an echo, hanging mysteriously in the humid atmosphere of the African jungle. This fact cannot be entirely divorced from Conrad's insistence that "explicitness ... is fatal to the glamour of all artistic work, robbing it of all suggestiveness, destroying all illusion" (3). I am not at all sure that I can agree with this. The more complete the detail, it seems to me, the more powerful the illusion. Nevertheless, Conrad's comment can help us to appreciate the extent to which his creation of Kurtz is deliberately vague. As a character he is at best sketchy, but if we look on him as a kind of symbol, precisely in terms of his "suggestiveness", then we have to admit that he is finely presented. At the same time, this does not alter the fact that if it was Conrad's intention to make us "see", his declared aim for The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', then we do not have the advantage of this 'seeing' in 'Heart of Darkness'. In other words, Kurtz's lack of substance as a character is a flaw which I would not want to deny.

A second and equally important criticism of 'Heart of Darkness', and one to which I have already alluded, is that it is not always possible to know with any confidence precisely what Conrad is getting at. The part of the tale most commonly cited as lacking crucial detail is that which withholds the exact nature and extent of those mysterious rites and degradations presided over by Kurtz. Perhaps Conrad would have found our inquisitiveness morbid or even indecent, but there are important and legitimate questions to which we need to know the answers. What precisely did Kurtz do? And

what is this "darkness" he is assailed by?

Amongst Conrad scholars, none are so dismissive on this point as Leavis, who finds that Conrad is "intent on making a virtue out of not knowing what he means" (4). I cannot agree with this if only because it is tantamount to calling Conrad a fraud. And that he most emphatically is not. If the answers to our questions are not in the text, though I for one wish they were, it does not mean that there are none to be unearthed. Amongst Conrad's critics in general, however, few have been prepared to voice a similar opinion quite so unequivocally and, I think, with good reason. First because the tale, amongst other things, attempts to explore the primary nature of man; in other words, man beyond the restraints of civilization or culture, of which language itself is a part. Thus, in a sense, what Marlow experiences must be, quite literally, "unspeakable". To the extent that 'Heart of Darkness' is about primal man, it seems to endorse Carlyle's vision of our savage ancestors.

To the wild deep-hearted man all was yet new, not veiled under names or formulas; it stood naked, flashing-in on him there, beautiful, awful, unspeakable. (5)

Another objection to Leavis's assertion that Conrad does not know what he means in 'Heart of Darkness' is that throughout a broad spectrum of his work Conrad exhibits an instinctive, if not philosophical, conviction that there is a real world, quite distinct from the ordered normality of everyday life, whose truths are at best elusive and shadowy. Appropriately, Conrad sets his tale in Africa, a world where the cosy half-truths accepted so blindly in civilized Europe are torn asunder by the primary and primal realities of a world without meaning.

Paradoxically, then, 'Heart of Darkness' is a complex array of words designed, amongst other things, to demonstrate their own inadequacy. If, however, no word in normal usage can express the almost inexpressible, then it must be made to mean more than, or even something different from, what it normally means. In other words it must become, in a literary rather than a linguistic sense, a symbol. The crucial symbol in 'Heart of Darkness' is, of course, 'darkness' itself and the tale can be seen as one long effort to explain to us what that symbol means.

II

As C.B. Cox writes, "insistence on the failure of civilized language is a central purpose of the novel" (6). Marlow's inability to 'tell' is part of a larger pattern of symbols designed to register the absence of a common code of meanings between himself and his listeners. This does not become obvious, even to Marlow himself, until quite late in the tale, but references to linguistic ambiguities are scattered liberally throughout. Prior to Marlow's central difficulty in trying to name that which has no name, there is an equally disturbing problem of communication in that names conceived in a European context are seldom appropriate in Africa. The first suggestion of this occurs during Marlow's sea-voyage along the African coast - a journey bearing all the hall-marks of a descent into Hades - when he comes across a French man-of-war shelling the African continent.

In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop, would go one of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech - and nothing happened. Nothing could happen. There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding,

a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight; and it was not dissipated by somebody on board assuring me earnestly there was a camp of natives - he called them enemies! - hidden out of sight somewhere. (pp61-62)

This is the first of many instances of mis-naming, carefully inserted throughout the text, each adding force and consistency to Conrad's creation of a world outside of civilization. For if words bear no relation to reality, they lose their authority and moral codes and behavioural patterns painfully evolved in Europe become meaningless. When the "Harlequin" insists that the human heads ranged on poles erected outside the Inner Station were those of rebels, Marlow laughs bitterly.

Rebels! What would be the next definition I was to hear? There had been enemies, criminals, workers - and these were rebels. Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks. (p.132)

Marlow, of course, is quite right. Only the absurdly applied word "rebel" can in any sense legitimize the slaughter. But a "rebel" can only exist in the context of a social organization conceived in common by all or a majority of protagonists. And this is precisely what does not exist in the Africa of 'Heart of Darkness'. Indeed Conrad here brings to our attention the way in which words are value-laden. It requires but a minor manipulation of the circumstances to see how certain key words in our vocabulary have important political colourings. Whether we call Robert Mugabe, for example, a "rebel" or a "freedom-fighter" is a matter of political predilection. It may also be a matter, importantly, of whether we are speaking before or after the establishment of Zimbabwe and his elevation to the post of Prime Minister of that country. On the other hand a politically neutral observer might be hard pressed to find words suited to his

position. In much the same way, Marlow is unable to replace the offensive word "rebel" with an alternative. In the absence of a code of meanings he can accept, in other words a code of meanings which meaningfully relate to his sense of what is true, he wisely remains silent.

The problem of naming, of course, is not confined to the natives, but extends also to the Europeans in the tale. It is manifested in the fact that most of them do not have names as such but titles. Significantly, the anonymous secondary narrator identifies Marlow's audience in terms of their functions in society: the "Director of Companies"; the "Lawyer"; and so on. In the context of the European world of which they are a part these titles have a distinct and easily comprehended meaning; they tell us something about them. But how meaningful are they in the context of the African jungle? In the latter context it would be important to know if they were good hunters, or physically strong, or something of this sort. Clearly, their European labels cannot easily be translated into African terms.

At the Central Station (an ambiguous title in itself) Marlow meets a young agent who, in other circumstances, might have been described as a "brick-maker".

The business intrusted to this fellow was the making of bricks - so I had been informed; but there wasn't a fragment of a brick anywhere in the station, and he had been there more than a year - waiting. It seems he could not make bricks without something, I don't know what - straw maybe... However, they were all waiting - all the sixteen or twenty pilgrims of them - for something... (p77)

These men are waiting for their social and economic functions to be returned to them. Without that clearly definable function which is the product only of a complex and cohesive

social organization, the titles become meaningless or simply absurd. The young fellow of whom Marlow speaks is not a "brick-maker" and in the absence of the economic function implied by such a title, he has no real identity. It is this which lies behind C.B. Cox's observation that the pilgrims are "all hollow men" (7).

Faced with this problem of naming, Marlow significantly resorts to a much more primitive mode of ascribing names to the people he encounters, based upon what they look like: men become "pilgrims" because they carry staves; one man becomes a "harlequin" because the multi-coloured patches on his garments produce the effect of a theatrical costume identifiable to his listeners. These 'names' are carefully selected for their ironic and symbolic force. The "pilgrims" in 'Heart of Darkness' are purposeless, immoral and spiritually impoverished; quite the opposite of pilgrims in the normal sense of the word. Still more effective, it seems to me, is the choice of the word "harlequin" to describe the fantastic Russian sailor who prostrates himself before the enigmatic Kurtz. The figure becomes a clown, symbolising the comic farce played out by these ludicrous Europeans in the heart of an immense continent. This, of course, is only part of a more extended metaphor which describes the activities of European imperialists in terms borrowed from the theatre. The trading stations on the African coast, for example, with their curious names - Little Popo, Gran' Bassam and so on - seem to Marlow to belong to "some sordid farce acted in front of a sinister back-cloth" (p.61). The significance of the theatre is that it is usually a place where one goes to experience an illusion of reality. The metaphor thus implies that our safe,

'civilized' existence should be understood as a complex matrix of role-playing, acted out without reference to a more primary reality. The further one moves from Europe, the more drama, tragedy or romance become farce.

As Edward W. Said has remarked, "...Marlow's journey into the heart of darkness is everywhere characterised by dislocations in psychological sense caused by the displacement of habitual values, objects, meanings from one place to another" (8). Nowhere is this more obvious than at the Company Station where a boiler "wallows" in the grass, an upended railway truck reminds Marlow of the "carcass of some animal" and a cliff is blasted without purpose or discernible effect. Once again, the lack of an identifiable function is the root cause of an absurdity: a railway truck without a railway; a boiler without a machine to drive. Clearly, without a function to perform, or a role to play, not only language and social convention but also inanimate objects become nonsensical. Conversely, therefore, civilization consists primarily of a functional order arbitrarily imposed upon reality. It is no wonder that Marlow's listeners find it difficult to comprehend what it is that he is trying to tell them. As Marlow says,

You can't understand. How could you? - with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbours ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums... (p 116).

This is a splendid explanation of Marlow's view of how society works. We see the way in which functions are distinguished and allocated between different individuals: the policeman to restrain you; the butcher to feed you. The "solid pavement" indicates the orderliness of the environment. The actions

of individual members of the community are controlled by codes of behaviour common to all and by the threat of legal retribution; scandal and gallows do indeed provoke a "holy terror". Importantly, Marlow includes in his list of socializing factors one of society's most devastating instruments of control - the lunatic asylum. The deluded, the obsessed, the psychotic; these are people whose sense of reality clashes with that of their neighbours. Reality is socially conceived.

Marlow's journey into Africa, then, takes him away from the comfortable assumptions and comforting illusions of a civilized environment and robs him of his sense of reality. His delight on discovering the seaman's manual, "An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship", is indicative of the extent to which his entry into a primitive environment has discomposed him.

The simple old sailor, with his talk of chains and purchases, made me forget the jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakeably real. (p99)

The economy of style evident here, as it is throughout 'Heart of Darkness', does not preclude depth of meaning. The sailor, says Marlow, is simple and old. But how does Marlow know these things? The author of the manual is a "Master in his Majesty's Navy", not an able seaman. And I daresay that the business of managing "chains and purchases" on a sailing ship is not a particularly simple matter. So why must he be a "simple" sailor?

The significance of this fact lies in the way in which a sense of reality is the product of an ordered and functional existence. The functions of ships and the functions of Master Mariners are easily comprehended, as are those of

accounts and accountants. Thus the sailor is simple because his sense of reality goes no further than this. This is particularly evident in Captain MacWhirr in 'Typhoon' whose steadiness in the face of the raging sea is a product of his inability to appreciate the full terror of the storm. Conversely, Jukes in the same story is paralysed with fear precisely because he is exposed to the elemental reality of the sea. Civilization, therefore, is a process which protects us by making us blind.

Significantly, the author of "An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship" is not merely simple, but also old. It is a curious and striking feature of Conrad's fiction that almost all his "simple" men are old. As 'Typhoon' suggests, it is the young men who are assailed by doubt and confusion. Their world is not the safe, uncomplicated world of their fathers, but a precarious edifice tumbling about their ears. They represent modernity - the terrifying fin de siècle malaise which is doubt.

The sense of dislocation experienced by Marlow, therefore, is of crucial importance to the value of the tale because the dramatic force of 'Heart of Darkness' is contained in the not knowing. Although London is also a place of darkness (an issue I will consider in more detail later), the distinction between the civilized and the uncivilized worlds is crucial. Whatever critics may say to the contrary, London is a familiar place to Marlow and his listeners and furnishes them with a sense of reality or normality. It provides the conditions necessary for a stable and untroubled state of mind. By contrast, however, the African jungle takes Marlow back to a world before meaning; to a place of pure sensation and experience, unmitigated by understanding. Fear of the

unknown, and perhaps of the unknowable, is Marlow's assailant. His problem, therefore, is how to resist a force which he does not comprehend and which he must struggle to define. To call this unknown force "the jungle" is wholly inadequate because the crux of the tale is not simply the exploration of an environment but of something much more nebulous and sinister. The word "darkness", therefore, becomes a primary appropriate symbol precisely because it is the negative of "light" - enlightenment. What Marlow seeks to describe is dark because it is not illuminated by meaning.

III

The title of the tale 'Heart of Darkness' is, of course, an elaborate play on words. It refers to the African Congo as the centre of darkness - a place devoid of understanding, a nameless and wordless place. At the same time it can be taken to mean simply a heart that is dark. The simple conceptual and experiential dichotomies between darkness and light, black and white, have been with us for thousands of years. At the very dawn of human civilization, and for countless thousands of years prior to it, man had been, and still is in many ways, a daylight creature. During the day he hunted and fought and went about his human business, whilst at night he was at his most vulnerable; a prey to the night prowlers, both animal and human. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that darkness is associated with evil and light associated with good. It is an interaction of symbol and metaphor deeply and powerfully embedded in the whole of human culture.

As I have already indicated, 'Heart of Darkness' takes us

back in time, down through the ages, back to an age of psychological darkness conditioned by a lack of understanding. It shows us how hollow and purposeless men become when they are robbed of their identities, their functions, and of their control over the environment. "Going up that river" says Marlow, "was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest" (pp.92-3). The extent to which these primordial surroundings discompose the Europeans in the tale erodes the distinction, so dear to the Victorians, between civilization and savagery. In the following passage, taken from 'An Outpost of Progress' (a title in which the irony is evident), Conrad confirms the appeal of the wilderness to even the most modern of men.

...the contact with pure unmitigated savagery, with primitive nature and primitive man, brings sudden and profound trouble into the heart... to the negation of the habitual, which is safe, there is added the affirmation of the unusual which is dangerous; a suggestion of things vague, uncontrollable, and repulsive, whose discomposing intrusion excites the imagination and tries the civilized nerves of the foolish and the wise alike.
(9)

For Marlow, and even more so for Kurtz, the wilderness strikes a chord. It awakes some sleeping memory which has lain dormant in the cosy wrappings of European certainties. What is remarkable about the anti-imperialist strand in 'Heart of Darkness', therefore, is not that it condemns imperialist brutality and exploitation, but that it powerfully affirms the kinship between the savage and the civilized man. Notably, and in simple moral terms, the Europeans in the tale may be compared unfavourably with the helpless natives they are in the process of destroying. The manager of the Central Station,

for example, virtually murders Kurtz by ensuring that the rivets needed to repair the steamboat do not arrive until it is unlikely that a rescue mission will succeed. By way of contrast, the reader's sympathies are manipulated in such a way that he is forced to feel something approximating to admiration for the cannibals who crew the steamer; simply because, although half-starving, they refrain from killing and eating their white masters.

What Conrad seems to be saying, therefore, is that the superiority of the white man over the African, which is so blandly accepted in European drawing-rooms, is a matter of superior power and not of any greater degree of moral rectitude. The darkness of which Marlow speaks, then, is the darkness of human evil; a fundamental wickedness at the core of human nature and human experience. What civilization does is merely to provide the stability of order, function and identity which serve to repress man's primeval instincts. The war with evil is a conflict which goes on inside our heads. But it is a war from which no Armageddon can arise. Human wickedness can never be triumphed over because it is endemic.

Several commentators have observed that Conrad's model of the human mind as seen in 'Heart of Darkness' shares many characteristics with that employed by Sigmund Freud, particularly as it is expressed in Civilization and its Discontents. Freud was convinced, for example, that in both the general and the particular the human mind forgets little, if anything, of its past. "In the realm of the mind", he writes, "... what is primitive is so commonly preserved alongside of the transformed version which has arisen from it that it is unnecessary to give instances as evidence" (10). Freud argues that we retain our savage, primeval instincts in modern society but

that this self - usually called the "Id" - is submerged below the level of consciousness. Representing the basic, primary human psyche it contains deep autonomous urges which are hostile to the conscience or internal inhibitor - the "Super-Ego" - which represses it. This inhibitor can be understood as an internalized social force which makes us conform to norms and conventions of behaviour acceptable to our peers and to society at large. The Id, however, remains a powerful component of our psychological composition and contains a degree of hostility capable of threatening civilization itself.

In consequence of ...[the]... primary mutual hostility of human beings, civilized society is perpetually threatened with disintegration. (II)

Freud was not alone in thinking that man's behaviour could be, and usually was, determined to a very great degree by primal forces not originating in the conscious mind. For example, in 1867 the German zoologist, Ernst Haeckel, had argued in his History of Creation that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, or in other words, that individual development reflects, re-states, reproduces the evolutionary or genealogical history of the race. Fin de siècle pessimism was primarily the result of a collapse in the belief in the perfectibility of man and the inevitability of progress. By 1898, even the great positivist, Herbert Spencer, harboured grave doubts about the moral future of mankind: "we are in course of rebarbarisation" (12).

As is commonly supposed, this lack of faith had much to do with Darwinist assumptions about the role of aggression and competition in the evolutionary process. The principles of Natural Selection, or "survival of the fittest" as it is often crudely and inaccurately termed, meant that the strong

and the ruthless were preferred by natural laws. Thomas Huxley, speaking for many concerned evolutionists, saw a clash between ethics and the cosmic process.

The ethical process is in opposition to the principle of the cosmic process, and tends to the suppression of the qualities best fitted for success in that struggle. (13)

Like Freud, Huxley feared that man has no intrinsic moral sense and that he is restrained or inhibited by forces that are ultimately social.

'Heart of Darkness' conforms very much to this pattern of thought and this can be seen particularly if we look at Kurtz. As I have already suggested, it would be a fruitless exercise to try to examine the significance within the tale of Kurtz as a character. If we are to understand what he is there for and why he is so crucially important for the success of the novel, we must be prepared to see him not as a character, but as a multiple symbol; a point of focus enabling us to appreciate the significance of other symbols in the tale.

Kurtz is a very gifted man and his giftedness may be measured not only in terms of the vast amount of ivory which he is able to collect, but also in terms of those talents very dear to 'civilized' Europe. By the end of the tale we know, for example, that he can write, paint, compose and orate. Indeed, in a European context, he has to be seen as the very model of civilization - at least in so far as civilization is often supposed to reside in the perfection of certain approved arts and skills. In keeping with this image of the talented and enlightened European, Kurtz professes to adhere to the laudable notion that each station should be "a centre of trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing" (p.91), and he has been entrusted, ironically it turns out,

with the preparation of a report for the future guidance of the "International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs" (p.117). Amidst the savagery and darkness of the jungle, however, the pride of all Europe, a towering figure, becomes corrupted and debased, a monstrously perverted caricature of the lofty individual he had once seemed. That such a man should be touched at all by the seductions of savagery and barbarism is symbolic of the destruction of Europe's best hopes for the future and testament to just how deeply pessimistic is 'Heart of Darkness'.

Ian Watt describes Kurtz as "one of Conrad's closest approaches to the portrayal of the unconscious and irrational pole of human behaviour" (14). This, it seems to me, is true to the extent that Kurtz is, in a sense, the heart of darkness. He is a symbolic part of Marlow himself, representing the main-spring of human action. But, surely, what Kurtz represents is not, as Watt suggests, an irrational "pole", but human irrationality itself? What we see in Kurtz is the conflict between an essentially unconscious evil and a conscious sense of good. He therefore becomes a paradigm of the human psyche, capable of the greatest heights and the greatest depths. Marlow tells us, for example, of Kurtz's

ability to talk, his words - the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness. (pp. 113-4)

Clearly, it is his linguistic gifts which make Kurtz more dangerous than the savages he is supposed to be "improving". Words can incite to evil just as easily as they can inspire to good - though it is precisely this faculty that makes Kurtz remarkable, as we shall see.

Let me return, however, to the issue of Kurtz as a

paradigm of the divided human psyche. That Kurtz is a man in serious conflict with himself is forcefully suggested by his otherwise lofty and eloquent report to the Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs, on the bottom of which he has scrawled "Exterminate all the brutes!" (p.118). It will, perhaps, be argued that this is not evidence of the man's internal conflict, but of a simple and fundamental change of character or personality wrought upon him by the dark temptations of the jungle. However, for an answer to this point we need only consider Kurtz's reaction to the arrival of Marlow. Amongst the letters he has received from Europe is one which evidently informs him that Marlow is a kindred spirit. Kurtz, by way of response, looks Marlow directly in the face and says "I am glad" (p.135). With the shrunken heads watching on, it is difficult to believe that Kurtz can still be concerned about anyone having a civilizing mission; and yet it is clear that he really means what he says.

Another way of discovering what Kurtz represents is through his women. His mistress and his fiancée are two excellently contrasted figures; even if their value lies only in their representational or symbolic qualities. The Intended appears to be a noble and highly spiritual creature and although she is dressed in black when Marlow pays his visit, we may sense a certain whiteness about her. This is perhaps to juggle the mental images of the two women a little too nicely, but we instinctively grasp the essential contrast between them: the spiritual and the passional; the physical and the mental; the idealized and the brutalized; perhaps even the good and the evil. Something in each of them appealed to Kurtz and in the contrast between the two women we detect the essential schizophrenia of the man.

Kurtz, then, can be seen as a representative of human irrationality, for he demonstrates how the 'civilized' conscience can co-exist with the primal subconscious. Significantly, his evildoings are associated with periods of fever when he is not in full control of his actions. In this way, his illness comes to symbolise what for Conrad is a universal human malaise in that the hegemony of our conscious minds over our primal and unconscious impulses cannot be guaranteed.

As I have already indicated, there are many aspects of 'Heart of Darkness' which seem to reflect the dominantly pessimistic mood of the fin de siècle period. Several commentators appear to be satisfied that this constitutes sufficient grounds for supposing that the book is strongly representative of its time. We have seen how closely Conrad's model of the human mind, as typified by Kurtz, resembles that of Huxley, and that the relationship in the novel between civilization and savagery seems to endorse Haeckel's bio-genetic "law". Similarly, one critic seeks to establish a link between Kurtz's behaviour and von Hartmann's postulation of a primal and "demonic" Unconscious (15). However, although such comparisons can be valuable indicators of the general intellectual atmosphere that was then current, there is the danger of interpreting Conrad's concerns too narrowly. In other words, I do not think it would be wise to over-emphasise the links with fin de siècle pessimism and Darwinian theories of evolution if this leads us to suppose that the novel should be seen simply as a product of the intellectual pre-occupations of its day. After all, 'Heart of Darkness' has much in common with the theories of Freud, as we have seen, and yet it was written long before he had

received much publicity. What I want to stress, therefore, is that Conrad may have been influenced by more traditional concerns, particularly and significantly by some which arose much earlier in the nineteenth century.

Conrad's apparent conviction that man is, and always has been, a savage, and that civilization is therefore essentially a matter of repression, is, of course, nothing new. In Judeo-Christian theology the prominence of sin as an integral part of the human condition can be dated back to The Fall. And Christians have always maintained that both man and the universe as a whole can be divided between the material and the spiritual. Man is torn between the body and the spirit and the suppression of the former must constitute the first step on the road to salvation. Thus the idea of the divided psyche is not even new to the nineteenth century.

More important than this, it seems to me, is the fact that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provided some splendid examples of man's capacity to inflict pain and suffering on his fellows. As a Pole, Conrad was particularly well placed to experience the tragic indignities to which history can expose a people. The harshness and brutality of Russian autocracy must have made him deeply cynical about human nature. And as a European and a keen student of history he must also have been well aware of the upsurges of popular violence with which history is littered. Like many others, his interest may have been particularly drawn to the massively destructive energies released during The Revolution and The Commune. The French historians Taine and le Bon argued that The Terror had amounted to an authentic resurrection of the conditions of primitive barbarism (16). Similarly, Carlyle took the view that modern man is essentially savage and,

equipped with the weapons of civilization, potentially more destructive than his primitive ancestors. With the French Revolution specifically in mind, he asks what will remain if the habits, customs and beliefs which bind a society together are swept away?

The five unsatiated senses will remain, and [the] sixth insatiable Sense (of vanity); the whole demonic nature of man will remain, - hurled forth to rage blindly without rule or rein; savage itself, yet with all the tools and weapons of civilization: a spectacle new in History. (17)

If such writers as these were inspired by The Revolution to examine what happens to the mob when the social structure disintegrates, why should Conrad not have drawn inspiration from the same or a similar event in examining what might happen to an individual when he is removed to an environment where the social structure is simply absent? Such speculation becomes more attractive when we consider that many of the assumptions made by men like Carlyle and le Bon also find expression in Conrad's fiction, as I hope to demonstrate. And since they all share a similar view of man and of society and how it operates, it is hardly surprising that we find them sharing similar political positions. I would argue, therefore, that although the influence of contemporary opinion seems to be evident in 'Heart of Darkness', it is important that we recognize that some of the key assumptions in the text have far older precedents.

IV

Marlow's reaction to Kurtz is ambiguous, for he is at once both appalled and fascinated. At the same time, however, he is influenced by the almost inexplicable desire to choose between this fabulous creature who has butchered natives for

ivory, and the manager of the Central Station who is a cold and calculating murderer who has no ability to his credit save that of staying healthy. The decision, if Marlow must make it - and I am mystified as to why he should - cannot be an easy one. As Marlow says, "it was written I should be loyal to the nightmare of my choice" (p.141), and a choice of nightmares aptly describes the dilemma.

Marlow in the end chooses Kurtz, which may seem strange because Marlow claims to hate lies.

You know I hate, detest and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appals me. There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies - which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world - what I want to forget. (p.82)

There can be no doubt, however, that Kurtz is a living lie. As Marlow himself says, "Kurtz - Kurtz - that means short in German don't it? Well, the name was as true as everything else in his life - and death. He looked at least seven feet long" (p.134). So why does Marlow choose Kurtz? It is true that the very fact that they both have names rather than mere titles affirms a degree of kinship between them. And it is also true that neither are "simple" men in the sense of the word as it is used elsewhere in the tale. But surely Marlow did not have to choose anybody? Indeed, why not condemn all? The only plausible answer, I think, lies in Marlow's insistence that Kurtz is a "remarkable man". I can best illustrate what I mean by contrasting Kurtz with the manager of the Central Station, which, of course, is what Marlow does.

The manager of the Central Station in 'Heart of Darkness' is unremarkable in his anonymity. He is "commonplace in complexion, in feature, in manners, and in voice.... of

middle size and of ordinary build" (p.73). Marlow further tells us that he "had no genius for organizing, for initiative, or for order even... He had no learning and no intelligence" (pp.73-4). This character appears to conform to what is virtually a Conradian stereotype. Cedric Watts has noted that Conrad had "an aristocratic contempt for the bourgeoisie" (18), and nowhere in his fiction is this manifested more than in characters like the manager of the Central Station. It would, of course, be to exaggerate its importance if one were to claim that class is truly an issue in 'Heart of Darkness'. However, Conrad's portrayal elsewhere of the lower middle-classes helps us to understand why Marlow finds the "pilgrims" so distasteful. I am reminded particularly of de Barral's cousin, the clerk in Chance, who takes it upon himself to 'look after' Florrie. This man "possessed all the civic virtues in their very meanest form, and the finishing touch was given by a low sort of consciousness he manifested of possessing them". Mrs. Fyne is unable to give Marlow an idea of the "abominable vulgarity" of the man and his family. They are people without "a grain of moral delicacy". What becomes clear is that the 'respectable man' does not provide a home for Florrie out of compassion; even Marlow says that he "can't admit humanity to be the explanation" for the man's conduct. The truth of the matter, as Fyne comments, is that "The fellow imagines that de Barral has got some plunder put away somewhere". Fyne has also commented, evidently with Marlow's approval that "for people of that sort... money - not great wealth, but money, just a little money - is the measure of virtue, of expediency, of wisdom - of pretty well everything" (19).

Similarly, the manager of the Central Station gets short shrift. Conrad's treatment of such figures is always tersely dismissive and I suspect that they represent a class of men of which he had little experience. There is a problem here in that such portraits come very close to being mere caricature. One could charge Conrad with a propensity for such writing throughout virtually the whole of his literary career. But there are, however, some good points about his portrait of the manager of the Central Station, not the least of which is that despite the pruning back of detail the character's two vices of envy and greed are well established. During the manager's conversations with his uncle, it becomes clear that he does not despise and fear Kurtz because the agent at the Inner Station is corrupt or immoral, but because he threatens his own position and authority as manager. Kurtz, it seems, has influence in Europe; not to mention the fact that he sends back a great deal of ivory. Much is revealed in the manager's sulky comment "Am I the manager - or am I not? I was ordered to send him there. It's incredible" (p.89). But Conrad's skill in making the man betray his moral emptiness through his own words is best seen, I think, when he is made to proclaim that Kurtz's "method is unsound" (p.137). As if the only criterion by which one should judge Kurtz's behaviour were one of commercial expediency. It is so trivial and inadequate a response that we cannot help but wonder if the man can really be so half-witted. His total lack of awareness of a world beyond the merely commercial would, I suspect, fit him admirably for employment in the firm of Dombey and Son. He is certainly a man who knows the dignity of his position. Of course, there is an implicit assumption, paradoxically in an ex-Master Mariner of the British Merchant Marine, that commerce

is somehow debased and debasing. More than this, men like the manager of the Central Station are not merely unscrupulous, they are also without talent or genuine virtue, respectably dull and hopelessly without justification for the self-applause they so often appear to indulge in.

By contrast, one could hardly argue that Kurtz is motivated primarily by greed or envy. If he has "gone wrong", he remains a "remarkable" man and he is therefore superior to the commonplace "pilgrims". For Conrad, as for Marlow, he takes on the stature of the Nietzschean Superman.

It would almost certainly be erroneous to suggest that Conrad had Nietzsche specifically in mind when he invented the character of Kurtz who, as I suggested earlier, is a many-faceted creation. There are, however, important ways in which the character is strongly reminiscent of the "over-man". Zarathustra, for example, says to the young man

"It is with man as with the tree.
The more he would ascend to height and light
the stronger are his roots striving earthwards,
downwards, into the dark, the deep, - the evil"
(20).

Kurtz also seems to share with Nietzsche a ruthless contempt for the commonplace and the mob. Nietzsche's view is well expressed by Zarathustra.

"... today the petty folk have become master. They all preach submission and resignation and policy and diligence and regard and the long etcetera of petty virtues.

Whatever is of the women's tribe, whatever descendeth from the slaves' tribe, and especially from the mish-mash of the mob - these will now become master of all human fate. Oh, loathing! loathing! loathing!" (21).

Clearly, Kurtz's forceful recommendation that we "Exterminate all the brutes" bears similar undertones. Even more obviously, sentiments such as these appear to lie behind Marlow's

decision to side with Kurtz. One may also be reminded of George Santayana's comments on Nietzsche's denunciation of Christianity. He claimed that for Nietzsche, Christianity was

mean, depressing, slavish and plebeian. How beastly was the precept of love! Actually to love all these grotesque bipeds was degrading. A lover of the beautiful must wish almost all his neighbours out of the way. (22)

Importantly, the kinship between Kurtz and Marlow is reinforced by the latter's obvious distaste for the slavishness of the "harlequin", who, "If it had come to crawling before Mr. Kurtz, crawled as much as the veriest savage of them all" (p.132).

Nietzsche's evocation of the superman had, of course, become a part of the popular and widely discussed fin de siècle interest in the nature and role of genius. In the 1890s the theory that the genius or the superman was essential to the advancement of humanity began to gain currency in England.

The extent of its appeal can be measured from the fact that several prominent Fabians (who of course claimed to be socialists) took up the banner of the superman. Amongst these were G.B. Shaw, who was a great admirer of Nietzsche, and H.G. Wells, who created a ruling caste of superior beings called the Samurai to rule over his Modern Utopia (23).

Precisely what sparked off the debate on the nature of the superman, the genius or hero, is impossible to say. However, it would again be entirely wrong to suppose that the issue was only of interest to Conrad's contemporaries. If we take Europe as a whole, and not merely England, we find theories about men of genius with a unique historical role to play, who are able to 'over-step' conventional morality and law, dating back at least as far as the Enlightenment. The idea can be found, for example, in Helvétius, who appended it to an utilitarian calculus in morality, thus allowing his man

of genius to break through the barriers set by moral imperatives. The idea was also taken up, with varying degrees of committedness, by the German Romantics including, of course, Hegel, who postulated the existence of, and the need for, great men who are destined to play a crucial part in the onward march of the Absolute.

Kurtz, however, is not merely a hero. As Jacques Berthoud points out, what finally damns Kurtz "is not the horror of the shrunken heads which decorate his house, nor even the ferocity of his raiding excursions, but what these things indicate: the appalling fact that he has taken upon himself the role of a God" (24). Although the text is vague in limiting mention of Kurtz's activities and his relationship with the natives at the Inner Station to "certain midnight dances, ending with unspeakable rites, which ... were offered up to him ... to Mr. Kurtz himself" (p.118), there is, nevertheless, sufficient evidence to secure this point. The harlequin figure, for example, speaks of Kurtz with the reverence one would normally only confer on Godhead. Here is a part of his conversation with Marlow:

"You don't know how such a life tries a man like Kurtz," cried Kurtz's last disciple. "Well, and you?" I said. "I! I! I am a simple man. I have no great thoughts. I want nothing from anybody. How can you compare me to ? ..."
(P.132)

More importantly there is, of course, Kurtz's native "mistress" whose position is clearly an exalted one.

She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men, that

hung about her, glittered and trembled at every step. She must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul. (pp. 135-6).

Her ornaments - "charms, gifts of witch-men" - make her role clear. She is not merely Kurtz's mistress but a high-priestess who mediates between the tribe and their God.

If we can grasp this point it puts us in a position to understand something which Marlow apparently cannot. When the half-starved cannibals who crew the steamer refrain from satisfying their hunger at the expense of the pilgrims, whom they could easily overpower, he looks at them

with a curiosity of their impulses, motives capacities, weaknesses, when brought to the test of an inexorable physical necessity. Restraint! What possible restraint? Was it superstition, disgust, patience, fear - or some kind of primitive honour? No fear can stand up to hunger, no patience can wear it out, disgust simply does not exist where hunger is; and as to superstition, beliefs, and what you may call principles, they are less than chaff in a breeze ... It's really easier to face bereavement, dishonour, and the perdition of one's soul - than this kind of prolonged hunger. Sad, but true. And these chaps, too, had no earthly reason for any kind of scruple. Restraint! I would just as soon have expected restraint from a hyena prowling amongst the corpses of a battlefield. But there was the fact facing me ... (p. 105).

Marlow is quite right. No "earthly" reason lies behind their restraint. But he is quite wrong in ruling out superstition. The superstitions of these cannibals are not akin to those which insist on the deadly dangers attendant upon walking under ladders. Their superstitions are much more potent in that they allow no room for doubt. Clearly, they do not

eat their white masters because, for them, it is inconceivable. They do not realise that the white man constitutes a potential food-source because they do not know that he is a man. The cannibal who works the boiler, for example, is aware of a devil inside the machine, presumably imprisoned therein by the white man - who is, therefore, a very powerful magic-maker indeed. Amongst the Europeans in the jungle, however, only Kurtz has the ability or the insight to capitalize upon this assumption. Marlow has remarked that the natives seem natural to the jungle, unlike the Europeans who seem out of place. This is surely because the former have ascribed meanings to the sounds and sensations of their jungle world; albeit through a primitive understanding of Gods and devils? The pilgrims, however, make no attempt to accommodate this world-view in their administration of affairs and attempt to impose upon the luckless natives a series of laws and behavioural codes utterly incomprehensible to them. Indeed, this sense of culture-shock is probably the most damning aspect of the whole imperialist enterprise, since the natives are invariably punished for crimes they did not know they were committing. As Marlow says, "the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from the sea" (p.64).

Kurtz's role amongst the natives, then, is that of the hero as God. This theme is strongly reminiscent of Carlyle's analysis of the divine hero, which he claims is "the oldest primary form of Heroism". For Carlyle, that men should worship their "fellow-man as a God" is perfectly comprehensible.

Such hideous inextricable jungle of mis-worships, misbeliefs, men, made as we are, did actually

hold by, and live at home in. This is strange. Yes, we may pause in sorrow and silence over the depths of darkness that are in man; if we rejoice in the heights of purer vision he has attained to. Such things were and are in man; in all men; in us too.
(25)

Carlyle's notion that we are still capable of man-worship echoes the implicit assumption of 'Heart of Darkness' that civilization has failed to obliterate man's savage roots. It is evident also that Conrad's conception of the hero-as-divinity is strikingly similar to Carlyle's own. The latter, for example, writes that a "Great Man" is

the living light fountain ... The light which enlightens, which has enlightened the darkness of the world... (26)

In the same way, that which makes Kurtz a truly "remarkable" man is precisely his ability to tell, to pronounce upon, and thus make comprehensible the essence of the jungle which Marlow finds "unspeakable". It is Kurtz's last words, "The Horror! The Horror!" (p. 149), that transform the sordid farce into a victory. For Marlow, his cry is "an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory". And Marlow adds, "That is why I have remained loyal to Kurtz to the last" (p. 151).

He had summed up - he had judged. "The horror!".
He was a remarkable man. (p.151)

Thus Kurtz, through his words - the "pulsating stream of light" (p.114) - becomes the "light which enlightens".

Conrad's creation of Kurtz clearly seems to conform to the essential characteristics of Carlyle's divine hero. It seems hardly likely, however, that Conrad was deliberately seeking to explore a specifically Carlylean type of hero, if only because there were so many other potential influences

acting upon him as I hope to have demonstrated. What can be argued, however, is that Kurtz is a critical response to a strand of nineteenth-century thought of which Carlyle was the most prominent Anglo-Saxon spokesman. But, whereas Carlyle was emphatic about the need for some kind of hero, Conrad clearly found this a deeply disturbing issue.

Although Kurtz is a remarkable man, Marlow is nevertheless ambivalent in his attitude towards him. As he says, the "pulsating stream of light" which is Kurtz's gift of expression, can also be the "deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness" (p.114). There is also, of course, Marlow's sarcastic remark that there was something lacking in Kurtz, " - some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence" (p.131).

What happens to Kurtz is that, when he takes upon himself the mantle of Godhead, he becomes not the master of his jungle kingdom but its servant. When the cannibals who crew the steamer are "restrained" by their assumption that the pilgrims are not mere mortals, it becomes implicit that human moral restraint is the product of a sincerely held belief, if not in God, then in some kind of higher power. Thus Kurtz might restrain the natives by acting out a divine role. Kurtz's fate, however, suggests that in the end it is not God who makes man, but man who makes God. What really matters in Kurtz is not his speech - his outgivings - but his bulimia. Marlow has a vision of him on the stretcher, "opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind" (p.155). In short, Kurtz becomes what he eats (27).

Kurtz, then, in his tortured psychological confusion is

a heavily distorted representation of the nineteenth-century heroic concept, very different from the sentimentalized heroes of Victorian romantic fiction. For this reason, 'Heart of Darkness' marks a turning point in a literary career very much concerned with heroes. In Conrad's early fiction, we may find real, identifiable heroes, especially, of course, in Jim and Singleton. But from 'Heart of Darkness' onwards the heroic vision is increasingly challenged to the point where it becomes almost entirely eclipsed by human inadequacy, frailty or duplicity. Witness, for example, Nostromo, the stunning reputation of whose hero becomes little more than a façade hiding the accumulating degeneration of an obsessive personality; or The Secret Agent, in which all of the characters are buried beneath layers of irony and mockery. Even Tom Lingard, whose heroic credentials are presented as unimpeachable in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands, becomes, in The Rescue, a man beset by conflicts and indecision in a world increasingly beyond his control.

Conrad's apparent rejection of the hero as a living entity comes not in the form of a literary spoof, but as a philosophic denial. The darkness of which Marlow speaks is not only moral, for it is also the darkness of nothingness. Like H.G. Wells, whose The Time Machine he had read (28), Conrad seems to have taken to heart the fin de siècle nightmare of a world doomed to extinction in the twilight of a dying sun. In a letter to Cunninghame Graham of 14th January 1898, he wrote:

The fate of a humanity condemned ultimately to perish from cold is not worth troubling about. If you take it to heart it becomes an unendurable tragedy. If you believe in improvement you must weep, for the attained perfection must end in cold, darkness and silence. (29)

Conrad, however, was faced with a more immediate dilemma which had arisen since the death of God perhaps as much as a century earlier. It did not require the discovery of evolution to throw doubt upon the veracity of theological assumptions about the existence and omnipotence of The Divine Creator, since in many spheres of European thought this had already been done by some of the eighteenth-century champions of reason (30).

Conrad's faith in God may be judged by the almost total lack of reference to Him in the long course of his literary career and we may suspect, although he nowhere says so with any clarity, that he thought religion indistinguishable from what he would call "mysticism". For him, there is nothing divinely planned, nothing divinely created and nothing divinely revealed. At the same time he was sceptical about the capacity of reason to do anything more than order the surface realities of human life, as I hope to demonstrate in a subsequent chapter.

Conrad's problem was how to establish a set of meanings by which the world could be understood. Marlow says of Kurtz that the "whisper" of the wilderness had "echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core" (p.131). This sense of hollowness in Kurtz and the pilgrims seems to symbolize the moral and cognitive vacuum in which they find themselves. Conrad's search for meaning, therefore, is also a search for moral authority, or at least for the roots of it.

If the Hero, in a sense, is an attempt to find God in man then the lack of heroes who are truly heroic in 'Heart of Darkness' and Conrad's subsequent novels, must throw serious doubt on the possibility of establishing moral legitimacy and a source of authority in this way. Kurtz is able to put a name to the darkness - "The Horror" - but his affirmation is

little more than the acknowledgment of despair. He fails to truly create in his jungle world because his jungle world has created him.

The sense of there being no answer to this dilemma comes to us strongly through Conrad's three great political novels, Nostromo, The Secret Agent, and Under Western Eyes. His struggle to find an intellectually and philosophically satisfying political position represents an integral part of his attempt to discover a cornerstone on which to build a moral universe. Unconvinced, however, of the existence of God, sceptical of reason, and, as I hope to show, distrustful of metaphysics, he was never certain that one could be found.

V

Although 'Heart of Darkness' is almost overwhelmingly sombre in tone, outlook and implication there are, however, some positive aspects to the tale. Of these, the most important is the protection afforded to the sophisticated and the unsophisticated alike by the dedication to work. Its essential value can be measured by Marlow's reaction to the strange and seductive sounds he hears from the steamer as it makes its way up-river towards the Inner Station. To Marlow, the sounds are familiar, for they are feverish echoes of a racial heritage. But he is able to resist their appeal simply because he is too busy to afford them his full attention.

You wonder I didn't go ashore for a howl and a dance? Well, no - I didn't. Fine sentiments, you say? Fine sentiments be hanged! I had no time. I had to mess about with white-lead and strips of woollen blanket helping to put bandages on those leaky steam-pipes - I tell you. I had to watch the steering, and

circumvent those snags, and get the tin pot along by hook or by crook. There was surface-truth enough in these things to save a wiser man. (p.97)

The value of this attention to work, particularly in discomposing surroundings, can be measured by the manner in which Marlow is able to relate to the boiler-maker at the Central Station (who, of course, has no such function).

I slapped him on the back and shouted "We shall have rivets!" He scrambled to his feet exclaiming "No! Rivets!" as though he couldn't believe his ears. Then in a low voice, "you ... eh?" I don't know why we behaved like lunatics. I put my finger to the side of my nose and nodded mysteriously. "Good for you!" he cried, snapped his fingers above his head, lifting one foot. I tried a jig. We capered on the deck. (p.86)

This passage offers us the only instance of genuine human warmth in the entire tale. But how could mere rivets have been the cause of such jovial camaraderie? The answer, simply, is that the rivets bring with them the prospect of providing something tangible to do. They endow both men with a function, the lack of which, as I have already suggested, is a root cause of the malaise experienced by the Europeans in the jungle.

Another figure of interest in this connection is the chief accountant. C.B. Cox writes that

The white human beings who greedily scramble for the ivory are all hollow men. The fastidious chief accountant is a hairdresser's dummy who has avoided the surrounding horror by merging his identity in his elegant clothes and the correct entries in his accounts. (31)

It is implied here that the chief accountant is not the man to be admired. This may be true; the reader has the right to make his own judgements. But what are we intended to think of Marlow's response to him?

He was amazing ... I respected the fellow. Yes; I respected his collars, his vast cuffs, his brushed hair. His appearance was certainly that of a hairdresser's dummy; But in the great demoralization of the land he kept up his appearance. That's backbone. His starched collars and got-up shirt-fronts were achievements of character ... This man had verily accomplished something. And he was devoted to his books, which were in apple-pie order. (pp. 67-8)

Once again, there is the insistence on appearances, on "surface-truth". The chief accountant may look like a hairdresser's dummy, he may be ridiculous, but his commitment to his work and to his appearance are obviously matters for which we have to give him credit. He is a remarkable man precisely because he creates and maintains order in the face of chaos. And his elegant dress is the result not of hollowness or vanity but of the imperative requirement to remain a functioning entity. This is in stark contrast to the "harlequin" Marlow so evidently despises. The Russian ex-sailor may be resourceful but his lack of attention to appearances makes him far worse than a hairdresser's dummy: it makes him into a circus clown. Lost and disorientated amidst the immensity of a hostile jungle, he is the only European to fall at the feet of Kurtz in the manner of the natives.

That the work-as-saviour notion should be stressed in 'Heart of Darkness' is no accident. It derives from a conscious philosophic commitment to the idea which can also be found in Conrad's non-fictional writings.

From the hard work of men are born the sympathetic consciousness of a common destiny, the fidelity to right practice which makes men great craftsmen, the sense of right conduct which we may call honour, the devotion to our calling and the idealism which is not a misty, winged angel without eyes, but a divine figure of terrestrial aspect with a clear glance and with its feet resting firmly on the earth on which it was born ... work will overcome all evil. (32)

That work is capable of overcoming all evil is obviously an extreme view, but the idea is not without precedent.

The nineteenth century was the great age of capitalist expansion, the essence of which could be seen in the development of steam power on both land and sea. Burgeoning faith in the future of industry and commerce found its expression in the construction in Hyde Park of the enormous glass and wrought-iron building in which the Great Exhibition of 1851 was to be held. Max Weber, in his Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, argued that the dedication to work, preached in particular by the Calvinists, was one of the major causes of the development of capitalism in the Western world (33).

Not everyone saw industrial advance as a positive good.

Ruskin, for example, who saw labour in general terms as a thing which ennobled the worker, was adamant that much modern manufacturing had the opposite effect (34). Conrad's work-ethic, as we see it in 'Heart of Darkness' however, is not Ruskinian. What Ruskin and the Calvinists, as the originators of the spirit of capitalism, had in common was that they both saw work in highly positive terms. Although their definitions of valuable work might be contradictory, they were agreed that it had somehow an uplifting quality; either in ennobling the man or in glorifying God. By contrast, Marlow's conscientious attention to the functioning of his steamboat implies not that a job of work can make you a good man, but that it may prevent you becoming a bad man. In short, Ruskin founds his ethic on an optimistic appraisal of man whereas Conrad's is based on a profoundly pessimistic appraisal. Not untypically, Conrad is reputed to have told Wells that

"The difference between us, Wells, is fundamental. You don't care for humanity but think they are to be improved. I love humanity but know that they are not". (35)

For Conrad, as for Freud, civilization is repressive. Its protection is a belief in the law and its chief instruments are public opinion, the policeman and the hangman's noose. Should our belief in the power and legitimacy of the law crumble, and we become exposed to the great dark chasm of nothingness or evil which underlies the human condition, then even the threat of capital punishment will not be enough to restrain our primal instincts. Winnie Verloc's fear of the gallows ("the drop given was fourteen feet"), pales into insignificance against her maternal fury. For this reason, work takes up a special place amongst the virtues Conrad extolled.

If Conrad's work-ethic is importantly dissimilar from that of Ruskin, it is much closer to that of Carlyle.

Doubt, Desire, Sorrow, Remorse, Indignation, Despair itself, all these like helldogs lie beleaguering the soul of the poor dayworker, as of every man; but he bends himself with free valour against his task, and all these are stilled, all these shrink murmuring far off into their caves. (36)

As with Carlyle, so with Conrad: the principal value of work is that, with our noses to the grindstone, we are thus able to turn our backs on that dangerous awareness which brings only doubt.

In Nostromo, Conrad tells us that

Action is consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions. Only in the conduct of our action can we find the sense of mastery over the Fates. (37)

Action, it seems, like work, has a positive value: it stops us thinking too much. This, I think, explains why Conrad's

fiction is so heavily committed to action. Astoundingly, Conrad's most recent biographer, Frederick Karl, claims that Conrad's great imaginative achievement is to turn silence or passivity into a creative force. Writing about 'Heart of Darkness', Karl states that "Marlow is silent before Kurtz, silent before the Russian sailor, silent before Kurtz's fiancée" (38). But surely Marlow takes a very positive stance? Before Kurtz he is "anxious to deal with this shadow ... alone" (p.92). He shouts at the Russian sailor, and if the harlequin does not hear, it is because he is deaf to all but Kurtz's voice, and not because Marlow is silent. Again, with Kurtz's "intended", it cannot be true that Marlow plays an entirely passive role. He connives at her continuing innocence with a lie. And a lie cannot be a silence. I do not pretend to understand Karl's view, at least in relation to 'Heart of Darkness', but it is clear that there is something vitally important about action in Conrad's fiction and that this factor is connected with his view of the saving capacity of work. In this, Conrad exhibits a somewhat similar view of human nature to Freud's in the sense that both felt that repressed desires and energies can be released safely and usefully only in work and games. There is, however, an important sense in which they differ on this matter. Conrad would claim that work is valuable in that it prevents us from getting too close to the primal realities, whereas, by contrast, Freud would claim that work secures us against dangerous fantasies.

No other technique for the conduct of life attaches the individual so firmly to reality as laying emphasis on work. (39)

Reality for Conrad, however, lies in the unseen. It lies outside culture and language in the brush with naked experience.

Conrad's emphasis on action would seem to imply some form of anti-intellectualism and, although this is hardly evident in 'Heart of Darkness', it is certainly strongly suggested by some of the sea-stories, particularly 'Typhoon' and The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'. In these we detect an admiration for simple hard-working men; men like Singleton and MacWhirr who are never troubled by the curse of profundity. They are capable of fidelity to others and of attention to duty because they are not thinking men. Conrad himself makes precisely this point in a letter to Cunninghame Graham, who had suggested that Singleton, the semi-literate seaman who is the backbone of the 'Narcissus' crew, would be complete if he were educated. Conrad's reply was as follows:

"Singleton with an education". Well - yes. Everything is possible, and most things come to pass (when you don't want them). However I think Singleton with an education is impossible. But first of all - what education? If it is the knowledge how to live my man essentially possessed it. He was in perfect accord with his life ... Or is he to study Platonism or Pyrrhonism or the philosophy of the gentle Emerson? Or do you mean the kind of knowledge which would enable him to scheme, and lie, and intrigue his way to the forefront of a crowd no better than himself? Would you seriously, of malice prepense, cultivate in that unconscious man the power to think. Then he would become conscious - and much smaller - and very unhappy. Now he is simple and great like an elemental force. Nothing can touch him but the curse of decay ... Nothing else can touch him - he does not think.
(40)

Conrad's argument here is complemented by Marlow's famous tirade against ideas in Lord Jim.

Hang ideas! They are tramps, vagabonds, knocking at the back door of your mind, each taking a little of your substance, each carrying away some crumb of that belief in a few simple notions you must cling to if you want to live decently and would like to die easy! (41)

This leads us to consider a curious, and in some ways tragic, paradox. The whole of Conrad's work-ethic would suggest that it is better that we remain unaware of the fundamentally horrific world in which we live. It is, of course, precisely this notion which lies behind Marlow's decision to preserve the Intended's "saving illusion" (p.159), and his chauvinistic comment that "We must help them [i.e., women] to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse" (p.115). On the other hand, however, Marlow insists that "you may be too much of a fool to go wrong - too dull even to know you are being assaulted by the powers of darkness" (p.116). He resents the blindness of the people in Brussels.

Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flauntings of folly in the face of a danger it is unable to comprehend. (p.152)

As Cedric Watts has pointed out, 'Heart of Darkness' appears to suggest both that "awareness is better than unawareness", and that "we may become aware that it is better to be unaware" (42).

VI

'Heart of Darkness' has always been taken for an anti-imperialist piece of fiction, which of course it is. We should not, however, accept without reservation Irving Howe's bland assertion that Conrad was an "anti-imperialist in an age of imperialism" (43). Despite the fact that 'Heart of Darkness' is powerfully critical of Belgian exploits in the Congo (44), we should not try to avoid dealing with those ambiguities and ambivalences in Marlow's account which

undoubtedly reflect Conrad's own.

There are, I think, three fundamental charges which Conrad in 'Heart of Darkness' lays against Belgian imperialism in the Congo: inhumanity; culture-shock; and exploitation. On the first point, Marlow makes it quite clear that the pilgrims regard the natives as something less than human. Prime examples of their inhumanity to man are the "chain gangs" and the "grove of death". Conrad's evocation of the pitiable situation of the natives, bought like simple commodities and discarded when of no further use, is direct and, as always, economical; but it is nevertheless powerfully written.

They were dying slowly - it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, - nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. These moribund shapes were free as air - and nearly as thin.
(p.66)

The style is unmistakeably Conrad's. The natives are dying of disease and starvation, but the food is merely "unfamiliar", the surroundings merely "uncongenial". These are typical examples of Conrad's use of ironic understatement to forcefully drive the point home. And the black humour in Marlow's suggestion that the natives are as free as air, "and nearly as thin", anticipates the powerful style of The Secret Agent.

The passage also demonstrates Conrad's interest in a less emotive issue - that of legality. As Marlow insists, the natives are not "enemies" or "criminals"; but an alien and incomprehensible law would make them so. Like all the other European imports, such laws are futile and absurd.

And they are part of a culture which the natives cannot possibly understand. Surely it is this culture-shock, more than anything else, which brings the natives to their knees? There can be few things on this earth more terrifying than a wrathful God whom one does not know how to appease.

Bearing in mind these related charges, "exploitation" seems a painfully inadequate word to describe the activities of the European traders in 'Heart of Darkness'. After all, exploitation is merely unjust. Whereas what we see in the tale is almost inhuman. Clearly, Marlow has no illusions about the moral rectitude of imperialism. "The conquest of the earth", he says, "... mostly means taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves". It is, he adds, "not a pretty thing when you look into it too much" (p.50). Much of this is confirmed by the tale itself. Amongst the pilgrims there seems to be continual talk of ivory, "fossil" or otherwise; the word is perpetually in the air. In the jungle, ivory is the nearest thing to hard cash. Even Marlow finds himself using it as a yardstick when he comments that Kurtz's native mistress "must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her" (p.135). And, although we do not have the benefit of seeing it in action, Marlow reports that the Eldorado Exploring Expedition has "no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe" (p.87).

The very fact that Marlow tells his tale in a London setting, before an audience of men directly engaged in commerce, might seem to implicate England in the crimes

alleged by Marlow against Belgium. There are, however, good reasons for believing that Conrad was not opposed to the exercise of British colonial rule in distant parts of the world - in which lies the ambiguity in his anti-imperialist stance. I shall come to those reasons shortly, but first I should like briefly to discuss the implications surrounding Conrad's choice of London as the setting against which Marlow's tale is to be told.

Since darkness is the primary symbol in 'Heart of Darkness', it must be significant that the description of the London setting also features darkness. On the first page we hear that

The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.

And on the last page:

The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky - seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness.

Clearly, darkness is in London as well as in the jungle, although I insist, as I did earlier, that there are important distinctions between the two. The implication, however, is that darkness is a universal condition. Indeed, it must be so since the tale shows it to be within our all-too-human hearts. I shall, however, deal more fully with London as a place of darkness when I come to discuss The Secret Agent.

Conrad's use of the London setting, then, may have something to do with a connection between the dark city and the dark continent. At the same time, it can be argued with equal, and perhaps more, justification, that the use of a secondary narrator and the haunting, threatening, tone of his description are more significant than the location.

We should not forget that Conrad was writing for an English readership. Why not, then, have Marlow tell his tale in London? By contrast 'Heart of Darkness' is structured much more carefully than most of his other early works and should, for this reason, interest us more.

Significantly, Conrad had intended 'Heart of Darkness' to be considerably shorter than it eventually turned out to be (45). I would argue, therefore, that it was originally conceived as a conte in the Maupassant style (46). I have already, at various times, stressed the economy of style employed in 'Heart of Darkness' which, of course, is the singular feature of Maupassant's art. More important than this is the structure of the tale which, if we compare it with that of, say, 'La Peur', reflects a degree of similitude hardly accidental. In this way, the setting for Marlow's tale appears to suggest a conscious attempt to copy Maupassant's use of the cadre, a simple technique whereby an usually anonymous secondary narrator is employed to create an atmosphere appropriate to the tale and to authenticate the teller. Only in Conrad's much more marked use of symbolism can his work be distinguished from that of Maupassant in terms of structural and stylistic intention. The cadre, then, demands that a dark tale be told in a dark place. London must be dark for technical reasons which need not necessarily include a symbolic purpose.

There are other reasons for thinking that Conrad did not intend the novel's condemnation of imperialism to be interpreted as an attack on British colonialism. Probably the most important is the fact that Marlow is careful to distinguish between the British, who are "colonists", and the other

imperialist nations, who are "conquerors". After telling his audience of the psychological and emotional strains imposed upon the Romans in their conquest of Britain, he goes on to insist that

Mind, none of us would feel exactly like this. What saves us is efficiency - the devotion to efficiency. But these chaps were not much account really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force ... They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence ... (p.50).

A little later in the narrative, Marlow gives himself away again when, standing in the reception room of the Belgian trading company, he observes a large shining map, marked with all the colours of the rainbow. He comments that "There was a vast amount of red - good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done in there" (p.55).

Conrad, then, clearly displays in 'Heart of Darkness' a pro-British bias. I say Conrad, because I simply do not believe that in this strongly autobiographical story, Marlow is not to be trusted, even though this is what some commentators have suggested. The crucial weakness in that argument is that the events occur before the tale in which they are told. It is a retrospective account, not a running commentary. Marlow, therefore, being fully aware of the potential horrors of imperialism, is hardly an appropriate purveyor of the chauvinistic sentiments such critics accuse him of. In short, he speaks unambiguously for Conrad as a man who condemns the injustice and brutality of imperialism as practised by the continental powers, but who believes that British colonialism is genuinely a separate issue. Interestingly, Richard Curle reports a conversation between Conrad and a Labour M.P.,

Colonel Josiah Wedgwood, on the subject of British rule in India. The Colonel, according to Curle, "was all for greater freedom and responsibility", whereas Conrad "believed in the necessity of resolute British rule" (47). It is exceedingly difficult to account for this apparent endorsement of British colonialism if we take the view that Conrad was a genuine opponent of that process.

Conrad's deliberate exclusion of British colonialism from his attack on imperialism compromises the anti-imperialist stance of 'Heart of Darkness'. The tale seems to suggest, contrary to the assumptions of many of Conrad's contemporaries, that Europeans are not innately superior to native Africans, at least in the moral sense, and it also appears to endorse the view that cultures alien to our own are nonetheless valid. At the same time, however, it also implies that Europeans, no matter how similar to Africans, are dissimilar from each other, in that British moral superiority over their continental neighbours is implicit. In a letter to Kazimierz Waliszewski, Conrad offers a somewhat inadequate defence in the face of the former's charge that he was pro-British.

As to the question of 'inferiority of races', I permit myself to protest- although evidently the fault is on my side for having given you the wrong idea of my intention. It is the difference between races that I wished to point out. (48)

Perhaps a more accurate measure of Conrad's true feelings towards the British Empire is this letter to Mrs. Aniela Zagórska about the Boar War:

Much might be said about the war. My feelings are very complex - as you may guess. That the Boers are struggling in good faith for their independence cannot be doubted; but it is also a fact that they have no idea of liberty, which can only be found under the English flag all over the world. C'est un peuple

essentiellement despotique, like by the way all the Dutch. This war is not so much a war against the Transvaal as a struggle against the doings of German influence. It is the Germans who have forced the issue. There can be no doubt about it. (49)

Opinions of this sort can also be seen in Conrad's fiction. For example, although his feelings towards the Germans should be understood in terms of his Polish background, attacks on this particular nation occur in his novels with some monotony. Even in 'Heart of Darkness', Marlow sees on the map a "purple patch, to show where the jolly pioneers of progress drink the jolly lager-beer" (p.55). In Lord Jim, the German captain of the Patna seems to Jim the "incarnation of everything vile and base that lurks in the world" (50). He abandons his ship and its precious human cargo in order to save his own "soft and greasy" skin. We might, perhaps, believe it to be a mere coincidence that this rogue should be a German, were it not for the detestable figure Schomberg. The latter appears in both 'Falk' and Victory and in the novel of 1915 it is he whose violent jealousy and malevolent nature bring about the destruction of the innocent Lena. More or less the only good German in Conrad's fiction is Stein in Lord Jim. Stein, however, is Bavarian; an important distinction to a man whose country was partitioned at the hands of Prussia. (51)

This sort of racial or national prejudice is also evident in Conrad's treatment of other races too. We may note, for example, how all of the anarchists in The Secret Agent are given foreign-sounding names. The important question, however, is this: could Razumov, or Mostromo, or Almayer, have been Englishmen? I think not. Clearly the English are, more or less, beyond reproach.

It would not be pertinent to this thesis to argue the merits and demerits of Conrad's support for British colonialism. But it is perfectly proper to enquire into the way in which this affects the quality of the work in hand. What we find is that Marlow's defence of British colonialism is vague, mysterious and inadequate. He leaves so many important questions unanswered that we can hardly doubt that the tale is harmed by his absurd claims. There is something about the assertion "what saves us is efficiency - the devotion to efficiency", which grates on the nerve; something about his insistence on an "unselfish belief in the idea - something you can set up, and bow down before" which embarrasses because it sounds so utterly fraudulent. And, above all, such comments cheapen and trivialise what is otherwise a powerful piece of fiction fully intended to deal with important contemporary issues. What is more, this was not done to accommodate the patriotic sentiments of Conrad's English readership, but it does reflect the author's own confused and problematic thinking on the subject.

I end with a question: was Conrad incapable of distinguishing between British colonial administration and the Merchant Navy? It is only in the latter that Conrad can have seen this "devotion to efficiency". And only there that he could discern an unselfish belief in an ideal, which is the ideal of endurance and fortitude and good seamanship, as The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' so eloquently testifies.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Frederick Karl, Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives (1979), p.459.
2. Conrad to William Blackwood, May 31, 1902. Karl, op.cit., p.468.
3. Conrad to Curle. Richard Curle, The Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad (1928), p.77.
4. F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (1948), p.180.
5. Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus; Lectures on Heroes, Chartism, Past and Present (1895), p.190.
6. C.B. Cox, Joseph Conrad: The Modern Imagination (1974), p.50.
7. Ibid., p.52.
8. Edward W. Said, "Conrad and Nietzsche" in Norman Sherry (ed.), Joseph Conrad: A Commemoration (1976) p.72.
9. Tales of Unrest (Dent), p.89.
10. Sigmund Freud, Civilization and its Discontents (1969), trans. J. Riviere, p.5.
11. Ibid., p.49.
12. Quoted in Ian Watt, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century (1979), Los Angeles, p.163.
13. Quoted, Ibid., p.162.
14. Ibid., p.217.
15. John Saveson, Joseph Conrad: the making of a moralist (1972), Amsterdam, pp.53-63.
16. See particularly le Bon, The Psychology of Revolution (1913).
17. Thomas Carlyle, The French Revolution (1888), p.13.
18. Cedric Watts, Conrad's Heart of Darkness: a critical and contextual discussion (1977), Milan, p.5.
19. Chance (Dent). Quotations are from pages 130,163,174 and 173 respectively.
20. Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra (1896) trans. A.Tille, Part one, "Of the Tree at the Hill", pp.51-2.
21. Ibid., Part IV, "Of Higher Man", p.429.
22. George Santayana, Egotism in German Philosophy (1939), p.113.
23. The New Machiavelli seems to be strongly autobiographical. The Webbs are in it, thinly disguised as the Baileys; the Pentagonam Circle of the novel is clearly representative of the imperialist Co-efficients Club of which Wells was a member; and Remington's affair with Isabel is closely

23. reminiscent of Wells's relationship with Amber Reeves. I think we can assume, therefore, that Remington speaks more or less unambiguously for Wells. It is worth quoting at some length a passage in which Remington is giving a paper to the Pentagram Circle.
"After my preliminary attack on vague democracy I went on to show that all human life was virtually aristocratic; people must either recognize aristocracy in general or else follow leaders, which is aristocracy in particular, and so I came to my point that the reality of human progress lay necessarily through the establishment of freedoms for the human best and a collective receptivity and understanding. There was a disgusted grunt from Dayton, 'Superman rubbish - Nietzsche. Shaw! Ugh!' I sailed on over him to my next propositions. The prime essential in a progressive civilization was the establishment of a more effective selective process for the privilege of higher education, and the very highest educational opportunity for the educable ... We didn't want a mere process for the selection of good as distinguished from gifted and able boys ... we wanted all the brilliant stuff in the world concentrated upon the development of the world." (Penguin, 1946, pp.258-9). Wells, then believed in an aristocracy of talent. So did Shaw, as we can see if we read the preface to The Apple Cart. They thought democracy slow and inefficient in practise, and little more than a chimera in principle. Which may lead us to believe that they had more in common with the aristocratic Conrad than either they or he would have admitted.
24. Jacques Berthoud, Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase (1978), p.54. In this connection, some commentators have noticed the similarity between 'Heart of Darkness' and Kipling's 'The Man who would be King'. In Kipling's story, an attempt to play God amongst the natives is equally disastrous.
25. Carlyle, "Lectures on Heroes", op.cit., p.187.
26. Ibid., p.185.
27. Tony Tanner comes close to saying this when he claims that Kurtz is "the real cannibal in the book". "'Gnawed Bones' and 'Artless Tales' - Eating and Narrative in Conrad", in Sherry (ed.), op. cit., p.31.
28. C. Watts, op. cit., p.12.
29. C.T. Watts (ed.), Joseph Conrad's letters to R.B. Cunninghame Graham (1969) p.65.
30. I am well aware that the Enlightenment did not represent an homogenous and cohesive set of beliefs. Certainly Voltaire, to name one of the most prominent thinkers, did not doubt the existence of some kind of supernatural order. Nevertheless, the lack of a consensus did little to quiet the voices of doubt. Diderot, for example, was an agnostic. He closes his Interprétation de la nature (1754), with a prayer which begins "Oh God, I do not know if you exist..". La Mettrie goes further in L'Homme Machine (1747) and in Système d'Epicure (1750): "Nature constructed, within the machine of man, another machine which proved suitable for

retaining ideas and producing new ones. ... Having made, without sight, eyes which can see, it made without thinking a machine which thinks." (Système d'Epicure, quoted in Norman Hampson, The Enlightenment, 1968, p.94.) Similarly, d'Holbach categorically rejects the existence of a Divine Creator in his Système de la nature (1770).

31. Cox, op. cit., p.52.
32. 'Tradition' in Notes on Life and Letters (Dent), pp. 261-2.
33. Julien Freund, The Sociology of Max Weber (1972), trans. M. Ilford, pp. 203-9.
34. Ruskin writes:
 "And the great cry that rises from all our manufacturing cities, louder than their furnace blast, is all in very deed for this, - that we manufacture everything there except men; we blanch cotton, and strengthen steel, and refine sugar, and shape pottery; but to brighten, to strengthen, to refine, or to form a single living spirit, never enters into our estimate of advantages. And all the evil to which that cry is urging our myriads can be met only in one way: not by teaching or preaching, for to teach them is but to show them their misery, and to preach to them if we do nothing more than preach, is to mock at it. It can be met only by a right understanding, on the part of all classes, of what kinds of labour are good for men, raising them, and making them happy; by a determined sacrifice of such convenience, or beauty, or cheapness, as is to be got only by the degradation of the workman; and by equally determined demand for the products and results of healthy and ennobling labour". Quoted in J.M. Mather, John Ruskin (1883) p.73.
35. Quoted by Hugh Walpole in his diary for 23 January, 1918, Rupert Hart-Davis, Hugh Walpole, a Biography (1932), p. 168. And also in Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad (1959), p.232.
36. Carlyle, Past and Present, op. cit., p.223.
37. Nostromo (Dent) p.66.
38. Karl, op. cit., p.467.
39. Freud, op. cit., p. 17 (footnote).
40. Letter to Cunninghame Graham, 14 December, 1897. Quoted by Karl. op. cit., pp.413-4.
41. Lord Jim (Dent) p.43
42. Watts, op. cit., p.4.
 Swift explores an almost identical paradox in section IX (Digression on Madness) of A Tale of a Tub. He seems to argue that it is better to be a genius than an ordinary man, but that it is better to be an ordinary man than a madman. There is, however, no difference between a genius

and a madman apart from time and circumstance. Swift seems to err on the side of unawareness, for he says that happiness is "a perpetual Possession of being well Deceived" (A Tale of a Tub (1965) Ed. Herbert Davis, Oxford, P.108). But then I suspect that Swift himself was not sure how far he took the matter seriously.

43. Irving Howe, Politics and the Novel (1957) New York, p.79.
44. Much of Heart of Darkness is, of course, based on Conrad's experiences in the Belgian Congo; the details of which can be found in Norman Sherry, Conrad's Eastern World (1966).
45. Ian Watt, op. cit., pp. 134-5.
46. Conrad was a great admirer of Maupassant's art, as is very evident from his brief essay on the man in Notes on Life and Letters.
47. Curle, op. cit., p.178.
48. Zdzisław Najder (ed.), Conrad's Polish Background: Letters to and from Polish Friends (1964) trans. Halina Carroll, p.242.
49. Ibid., p.232.
50. Lord Jim, (Dent), p.21.
51. It is worth noting that the Daily Mail was belligerently imperialist more or less from its foundation in 1896, and that it consistently carried on anti-German propaganda right through to the war. (L.C.B. Seaman, Victorian England (1973), p.422.)

Nostromo : The Critical Reaction

I

In these days of military juntas and sham democratic institutions, we can hardly fail to appreciate the topicality of the fictional republic Conrad explores in Nostromo. At the same time it is a well-documented fact that Conrad read several contemporary accounts of South American countries in order to make his Costaguana as authentic as possible (1). Things, therefore, have not changed much since 1904 when the novel was first published. Or so it seems. The issues that the novel raises are as alive today as they ever were, and particularly that of the political role of military men. Ironically so, for Conrad's novel is written as if it were a retrospective account of contemporary events, and General Montero should have been consigned to the history book Nostromo is half-intended to be. But he is alive and well and living in South America as a cursory glance at Chile or Argentina will confirm. Thus the novel displays not foresight, as it may at first appear to do but, on the contrary, the lack of it.

On the other hand, Nostromo has in this way unintentionally retained, for the time being at least, its flavour of modernity. This is partly the cause of the great wealth of interpretation and counter-interpretation which the work continues to be subjected to. It has proven a battleground for literary critics of all sorts of persuasion, many of them with their own axes to grind, and it is with some trepidation that I venture into the arena with my own observations and arguments. But I do not intend to enter into this Tower of Babel without first attempting to still some of those voices which threaten

to drown out my own. To this end, the first of these two chapters on Nostromo is intended to review some of the more important attempts at a comprehensive critical understanding of the novel. Many of these, it seems to me, raise as many questions as they answer. And if I seem to deal with some of them rather harshly it is not necessarily because I think them without merit or value, qua critical commentaries, but because they tend to confuse or interfere with what I have to say about Nostromo in the chapter which follows.

II

I shall begin by dealing very briefly with some of those critical appraisals which neither very much threaten nor endorse my own reading of Nostromo, but which seem, nonetheless, worthy of mention. To illustrate what I mean, we may consider Leavis's evaluation of the novel as we find it in The Great Tradition. His view is that the novel has a central political or "public" theme, which is "the relation between moral idealism and 'material interests'". The crux of this relationship is an "ironic pattern" in which the Gould Concession starts as a rallying centre for all who desire peace and order and ends up as a "focus of hate for workers and the oppressed and a symbol of crushing materialism for idealists and defenders of the spirit" (2). Well yes, if we think of Mrs. Gould or Dr. Monygham, this seems perfectly true. But it is not enough. And to understand why it is not enough we have only to think of the complexity of the personal and political problems the novel attempts to deal with. What of those characters who are not "idealists or defenders of the spirit"? (The spirit of what?). Are they

unimportant? Or perhaps they are irrelevant? But these characters include Nostromo, Gould, Viola, Decoud and Mitchell! So there must be more to it than Leavis will admit. The truth of the matter, and I do not mean this to apply only to Nostromo, is that Conrad is a much more sophisticated novelist than Leavis thinks. Being firmly convinced that Conrad was no philosopher and underneath it all a rather simple fellow ("in some respects a simple soul"), he was not in a position to deal with the full complexities of Nostromo.

On the other hand, he is to be congratulated for putting his finger on the source of that nagging sensation we all get on reading the novel that there is something not quite solid about it; that there is something important missing. As he says " ... for all the rich variety of the interest and the tightness of the pattern, the reverberation of Nostromo has something hollow about it ..." (3). He identifies this hollowness as the lack of an "intimate sense conveyed of the day-by-day continuities of social life..." (4). If we admit this to be true, and I do not see how we can do otherwise, Leavis has identified an important failing in the novel. On the other hand it would not be fair to Conrad to labour the point. The book is over five hundred pages long as it stands. And the first hundred pages or so are difficult enough to read as it is. In any case, if Conrad had rectified the omission it would almost certainly have diluted the dramatic impact of the action which is at the core of the book. Although the conception of the novel is broad enough to support the extra length, we might easily lose sight of the issues the novel does explore.

Similarly, C.B. Cox in Joseph Conrad: The Modern

Imagination declines to enquire into the complexities of the political issues in the novel, except to say that "Conrad does not believe that parliamentary government can solve the problems created by material interests" (5). It is curious that having chosen to put aside those political issues that are in the novel, he then chooses to comment upon one which is not. Certainly Nostromo implies a certain scepticism about the efficacy of parliamentary institutions. It is also clear that material interests bring with them major problems. But there is no reason to conflate the two. Much is explained, however, when we read that "Conrad will allow the reader no organizing image by which to understand Costaguana" (6). I will admit that there is some confusion in Conrad's presentation of his fictional republic, but if we are interested enough in it, a fruitful analysis is possible. Professor Cox, however, is interested in other things. And there is nothing wrong in that.

Much the same thing may be said of Jacques Berthoud's treatment of Nostromo in his book, Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase. Although his understanding of the political issues in the novel is better than that of C.B. Cox, his approach is restricted by the kind of book he has chosen to write; the critical outlook is broad and it is not intended primarily for the specialist. This is not to say that he does not make any points of interest and I shall be referring to some of his ideas in due course.

I would like now to turn my attention to those works which deal specifically with the political aspects of the novel, and I shall begin with Eloise Knapp Hay's analysis in her Political Novels of Joseph Conrad. For Mrs. Hay, the

essence of the novel's meaning is that "progress, leashed to faith in material interests, is inhuman, without rectitude, continuity, or force" (7). Her argument is that Nostromo is a "political fable" (8), designed to illustrate the inadequacy of a political future moulded from material interests which are themselves evil. I should like to make it quite clear from the outset that I do not disagree in general with her analysis, where it relates to the function of material interests in the novel. But, in particular, I disagree with her in two important respects. First, I do not think that Nostromo is in any sense a political fable; and secondly, I do not believe that the issue is so overwhelmingly important as her thesis implies.

Mrs. Hay's analysis rests heavily on two not unimportant but relatively short passages in the novel. The first of these, which virtually opens the book, relates a local folk-tale which tells of the fate of three treasure-hunters who disappear whilst searching for a fortune in gold on the forbidden peninsula of Azuera. The legend has it that the men find the treasure but that they become trapped for ever, standing guard over it, their bodies and souls in limbo. What are we to make of this simple parable about the evils of human greed? Mrs. Hay takes it to be a symbolic anticipation of the fate of Nostromo. But can we really believe Conrad has resorted to such an unsophisticated device? Surely he was much too clever a writer for that? I will be returning to this matter in due course, but for the moment, I shall say that Mrs. Hay has been mislead.

The second passage upon which her analysis rests is that in which Dr. Monygham, almost at the end of the novel,

predicts that the silver of the mine, and the material interests it has brought with it, will weigh heavily on the backs of the people just as lawlessness and poverty had once done. Mrs. Hay takes it that Dr. Monygham is here speaking for Conrad, and I am sure that she is right. But Monygham is not the only character who speaks for Conrad, as I hope to show, and he is in any case hopelessly biased against the San Tomé mine.

The problems which emerge from Hay's reading of Nostromo are twofold. First, although the novel has all the appearances of a "monument to futility", in the sense that "idealism and scepticism, faith and want of faith, both seem to lead to disaster" (8), and although it is clear that the new republic has its problems, still it is at least plausible to argue that some degree of human progress does take place. Indeed, Robert Penn Warren's refreshingly simple comment that "we must admit that the society at the end of the book is preferable to that at the beginning" (10), is difficult to refute short of abandoning some of our most precious moral convictions.

The second defect in Hay's analysis is that it leaves large sections of the novel unexplained. This is not to say that she ignores episodes or characters, but merely that her comments on them often have little, if anything, to connect them with her general interpretation. For example, her treatment of the old Garibaldino, Viola, is confined to the expression of her view that he merely represents the failure of the cause of abstract liberty. This, of course, is simply nonsense. There is nothing abstract about Viola's view of liberty. He knows precisely what he wants to be free from and who he wants to give that freedom to. The truth is that this character has been summarily dismissed precisely because

he lies beyond the pale of Hay's general argument. She must, necessarily, therefore, deny him the importance which is symbolized in the topographical centrality of the Casa Viola.

This brief examination of Hay's interpretation of Nostromo gives me the opportunity to discuss a contentious article, written by Michael Wilding, which was published some three years later. This article, for the most part, appears to have been based not so much upon an original reading of the novel itself, as on the Nostromo chapter in Eloise Knapp Hay's book. Wilding accepts the main points of Hay's analysis and then uses these as the basis for an extraordinary and virulent attack on Conrad's ability as a political novelist. In all fairness, this attack would have been proper and justified had his (and her) initial assumptions been correct. But in his attempt to destroy the credibility of Nostromo as a political novel, Wilding succeeds only in demonstrating the inadequacy of the "political fable" thesis. (11).

Seizing upon the fact that a fable or parable must necessarily mean that characters or events represent something, Wilding argues that in Nostromo the individuals contained therein are empty or vacuous once we have abstracted their representational characteristics.

What we notice about the characters in Nostromo is their representing something - the quality they 'stand for'. Then we notice their emptiness - the one feature given, there is little else of them. (12)

Unfortunately for Wilding, he chooses the character of Mrs. Gould to make his point. There is nothing to her, he claims, except "wealth, a lot of hair, a slender neck, walking along the corridors, loneliness" (13). But there is surely much more to Mrs. Gould than this? I think, particularly, of

two aspects of her character or role which seem to me to be important, neither of which Wilding mentions. One is that she not only stands for, but shows herself to be, compassionate - she is a woman with a sympathetic understanding of the needs of others. The other is that she is a society lady. I will be returning to this issue in due course, but for the moment I want to stress that the view that the characters in the novel merely represent something, is unconvincing when each is examined in terms of his or her relationship to the whole text and to the other characters within it.

Wilding's central charge against Nostromo is that it masquerades as a criticism of capital.

We thought we had a criticism of capitalism and instead we have a set of personal tragedies juxtaposed in an arbitrary fashion to give the appearance of capitalism at work. (14)

But did we think we had a criticism of capitalism? If Conrad had intended such a thing, why did he not choose to set his Costaguana in a more appropriate historical epoch? In truth, we could only find his criticism of capitalism in the sequel he didn't write.

Wilding's argument, if I understand him correctly, is based on the two key assumptions made by Hay in her book. The first is that the silver is intended to represent material interests; and the second that we are intended to believe that the silver is responsible for corrupting or destroying all those who become involved with it. If we put these two assumptions together, we must of course come up with the view that the characters are crushed by the silver of the mine, and therefore by material interests, and therefore by capitalism. Having made these assumptions, Wilding goes on to insist that

The conception of something 'standing for' something, in the simple way that silver stands for material interests, implies, not only a predetermined thesis, but also a necessarily simple and even crude analysis.
(15)

He then suggests that, in fact, the characters are not ruined by the silver, but by something else. In Gould's case, he says it is an obsessive occupation which might have been anything. Nor is Nostromo destroyed by the silver. He is ruined, according to Wilding, by sheer wealth; which could have been any wealth. I do not agree with either of these points, for reasons which will become clear later, but the crucial point is that Wilding thinks that Conrad has unconvincingly attributed political implications to purely personal tragedies. The fact is, however, that it is not Conrad but Wilding who attributes political implications by supposing that the novel is about capitalism. He has predetermined his own thesis.

Wilding's article solicited excellent replies from Ivo Vidan and Juliet McLauchlan. The most important point was made by Vidan, who commented that

Silver in Nostromo is not allegorical. It is money, in a form particularly accessible to the senses, easy to dramatize, and appropriate to the poetic and historical imagination. (16)

The truth of this statement, I think, is self-evident. Silver is silver is silver; it does not need to represent anything. The extent to which Wilding's interpretation leads him into confusion can be measured by his inability to spot real 'material interests' in the novel. The San Tomé mine is a material interest. It is the most powerful amongst a whole range of material interests, including the O.S.N. Steamship Company and the railway. When the wharf and the customs

house are defended by the employees of the O.S.N., that is an example of material interests at work. The same thing may be said of the defence of railway property by the construction workers, or possibly of Don Pepe's miners marching on the town. All of these events are real and not allegorical.

This, it seems to me, is one of the crucial weaknesses of the "fable" thesis. As Leavis indicates,

Sulaco, standing beneath snow-clad Higuerota, with its population of Indians, mixed-bloods, Italians and English engineers, is brought before us in irresistible reality, along with the picturesque and murderous public drama of a South American state. (17. My emphasis.)

But it is not only the imaginative success of Conrad's creation which counts. As Juliet McLauchlan points out,

Conrad scholars have shown in detail the extent to which he has made use of 'documentary' material in Nostromo, thus giving it a kind of political actuality which Mr. Wilding denies to it as a mere 'political parable'. (18)

More to the point, perhaps, is the fact that a fable or parable, if it is to be effective, must be at least uncluttered, if not actually simple; whilst Nostromo is extremely complex, both in presentation and content. It is worth quoting Vidan in his attempt to indicate the breadth of Conrad's vision.

Nostromo is a novel of a whole society in history. Against a precisely visualized geographical and ethnical background all the essential features of the life of a country are recalled, such as industry, transport, foreign trade and local commerce, army, catering trade, health service, the church, a legislative body, local authorities, foreign settlers, Jewry, aristocracy, working class, tradition, and outlaws. (19)

Thus, the way in which the politics of Costaguana are presented to us defies any reasonable attempt to represent Nostromo as a political fable. Conrad's insistence on a

kind of realism in his fiction, makes the novel at least very different from, say, Animal Farm, which is much more like a parable in presentation and outlook.

I think I have already said enough to expose the central weaknesses in Wilding's argument, but I should like to stress the point that it is not reasonable or fair to criticise Nostromo on the grounds that it fails to show you capitalism at work if you have not first of all proven that such was Conrad's intention. And the closer we look at the text, the more we realise that the forces of what we call 'capitalism' are only a part of the political and ideological forces at work in Costaguana. More important still is the need to recognize that what Conrad actually tries to deal with in the novel is not capitalism but materialism - of which, more latter. If we dislike Conrad's approach to the subject it is because we bring to the novel preconceived notions of what capitalism is and how it works. But our particular interest in the matter is not necessarily the same as that of the author. I suspect that Wilding's attack on Nostromo was inspired by his own political convictions. The truth of the matter is that he wanted to see capitalism exposed and was annoyed and dissappointed when Conrad 'failed' to produce the goods. How else are we to explain his vulgar and unwarrantable comment that Conrad's imagination was "nurtured on bad literature in a Parisian garret"?(20). The article in question tells us more about the politics of Wilding than it does about the politics of Nostromo.

Another issue upon which I feel comment to be necessary is the extent to which Nostromo does or does not, as the case may be, give adequate consideration to the role played in

society by 'the People' (to use Conrad's term). Wilding argues that in Nostromo the people are merely coloured extras. However, I find I must agree with Juliet McLauchlan who insists that the people are intentionally like coloured extras because that's what they are (21). To portray the private lives of 'the People' would not have been appropriate either to the dramatic intention of the novel or to Conrad's conception of a contemporary South American state. I might, perhaps, put it another way. It was not because his artistic imagination fell short of the task that Conrad excluded the people from the novel, as Wilding implies, but because he was convinced that their individual voices count for little in the conduct of public affairs.

From what little we do see of the people in Nostromo it is clear that they are mostly passive and helpless, acted upon by continually shifting pressures from outside interests. This viewpoint is evidently shared by Decoud, who claims that "poor peons and Indios ... know nothing either of reason or politics" (p.181), and the narrator tells us that

The popular mind is incapable of scepticism; and that incapacity delivers their helpless strength to the wiles of swindlers and to the pitiless enthusiasms of leaders inspired by visions of a high destiny. (p.420)

The view that emerges from Nostromo is that 'the people' form a kind of political arena in which potential leaders fight for their support. It follows that the novel must necessarily deal much more with the men and women who lead than with those who are destined to follow. Almost all of the characters in the novel are leaders in one sense or another, with the exception of those who, like Viola or, initially, Decoud, abstain from the world of political action by reason of their

scepticism or disillusionment. These are important and serious issues (and I shall be dealing with them fully in the next chapter). If we really wish to understand what Conrad was attempting to do in Nostromo, we simply cannot afford to be dismissive about such crucial questions.

Another of the charges commonly laid against Nostromo is that the characters involved are isolated from one another (22). In a novel which is supposed to show us a society, we are given merely a set of representational characters who don't really have relationships with one another. Wilding writes that

The old Garibaldino is isolated from the other characters, connected with them only by the not very convincing or interesting relationship with Nostromo and the hardly successful love interest of his two daughters. Similarly love ought to, but fails to, relate two other isolated figures, Antonia and Decoud. (23)

I agree absolutely that the relationships between Nostromo and the Viola sisters and between Antonia and Decoud are most unconvincing. In both cases they do nothing more than answer the needs of the plot. I feel bound to add to this list of unconvincing love affairs that between Dr. Monygham and Mrs. Gould.

I can believe in Guzmans Bento's torturers. And Conrad is also very convincing on the effect which their handiwork has had on Monygham. We can have absolute faith in his description of this shuffling wretch, broken in spirit and devoid of self-esteem. But it is precisely because I believe in these things that I cannot imagine Monygham as the fearless hero he later becomes. Conrad would have us believe that Monygham has been transformed by his unselfish devotion to Gould's wife. But can we really believe that

any love is strong enough to persuade any man to offer himself up to be tortured for a second time? It is utter nonsense.

As with the relationships Wilding draws our attention to, the details of the love which Dr. Monygham has for Emilia Gould are almost non-existent. In all of these cases we are required to believe in great passions and overwhelming emotions that spring up in the heart without introduction or development. Compare, for example, the way in which Nostromo's change of outlook is slowly built up by Conrad. The details of nagging doubts and new ideas are almost imperceptibly introduced into the text long before Nostromo's new convictions become apparent. But Conrad could never deal effectively with a love relationship. It would seem that love, particularly if it be sexual, is the one passion that was inaccessible to Conrad's creative imagination. He is able to carry us through a bewildering succession of base human emotions and actions, from murder to cannibalism in a seemingly effortless manner, but love for some reason only comes into his fiction as an unexplained and unexplainable emotion which we have to accept on faith or not at all. Inevitably there is no room in his fiction for love affairs of any substance, because there is no light and shade; no lust, no hate, no real passion at all; just the chill predictability of a thoroughly idealized emotion. In the one or two interesting and convincing male-female relationships in Conrad's fiction there is rarely any hint of sexual passion. I think, for example, of the Gould's marriage and the relationship between Stevie and Winnie Verloc. These can be effective because a sexual element would not be appropriate.

Wilding, then, is right to point out the unsatisfactory

nature of the love affairs in Nostromo. At the same time it is not very enlightening to insist that there are no real relationships in the novel if one has to rely on such failures to prove one's point. Surely it is to be understood from the outset that Conrad's characters are always and absolutely sexless?

But Wilding says more than this. He claims that Viola is connected with the other characters only by the "not very convincing or interesting relationship with Nostromo". On this issue I really do have to disagree with him. In the next chapter I shall be arguing not only that the relationship between Viola and Nostromo is intrinsically interesting but also that without a clear notion of what that relationship is, we cannot even begin to understand a major, and even crucial, part of the novel. Nostromo is not only about a society in history. It is also about people in history; it attempts to come to grips with the way in which values, ideas and ideologies are changed and transmitted in the succession of one generation to another. If we are to grasp the importance of this issue, we must begin by recognizing that several of the characters in Nostromo are related through time, through generations. Nostromo succeeds Viola as Gould succeeds Holroyd, and as Decoud succeeds Avellanos. This is what makes Nostromo an infinitely more important novel than Wilding could imagine. It attempts to deal with the fact that human consciousness plays a crucial role in the making of history.

III

I would like now to turn my attention to an ingenious interpretation of Nostromo which took the form of an article

by Peter Christmas and appeared in the journal Literature and History for Spring 1980 (24). In his article Christmas makes a valiant attempt to show that the novel examines the shortcomings and achievements of three national political traditions and tries to choose between them. He identifies an English or Anglo-Saxon tradition in the Goulds, a French tradition in Decoud, and an Italian alternative of the radical libertarian in the Violas. From the outset this thesis faces what appears to me an insurmountable problem. Put quite simply, this approach inevitably excludes from consideration that quite considerable and integral part of Nostromo that is Costaguana. Surely the political make-up of a South American state, being quite simply not Europe, must affect and mutate the ideas of those who come to it from outside, whether from England, France, or Italy? The kind of political instability that is a feature of Costaguana, as we see it in the novel, has not played a highly significant role in modern European history. What Costaguana lacks, with its colonial past and its ideological mimicry, is precisely that European history which Christmas would have to impute to it if his thesis were to be made workable. In short, the suggestion that Nostromo is a tale of Europe is misleading in that it tries to deny the novel's very real concern with the problems of South America. Nevertheless, it is worth taking a closer look at some of the details of Christmas's thesis.

He begins his exposition by pointing out that Gould arrives in Costaguana armed only with a contract, from which he succeeds in building a society wherein law and order prevail.

He represents in this the English view that sovereignty is benign solely in proportion as it confines itself to guaranteeing contracts and to making a secularized body of law whose main purpose is the regulation of property and fair trading. (25)

Thus, he claims, the Goulds stand for the English theoretical contribution to political science.

When Gould comes to a barbarous land demanding to have a piece of paper honoured - not in the name of honour but of mutual profit - in the background stands the whole Lockean contractual theory of the state as the sum of innumerable pieces of paper; when all the characters of the novel can be described in their natural relations as having only their own advantage to pursue, yet all appears to run smoothly, it is Adam Smith assuring us that everyone's self-interest, however basely calculated or fiercely attained, is bound to lead to universal well-being. (26).

This sort of argument is certainly very interesting but it depends upon a rather speculative attempt to read between the lines. My first objection is that there is actually very little in the text to warrant a comparison between Charles Gould's views and Locke's philosophy. The notion of contract in fact plays an almost imperceptible part in the novel itself. Quite apart from this, I find Christmas's reading of Locke eccentric to say the least. Locke's primary concern was to demonstrate precisely in what circumstances the citizens of a state might be justified in deposing, or otherwise getting rid of, their sovereign. As I understand it, the contract of which he wrote was either an historical event or a legal fiction, which was comprised of a set of individual persons agreeing to join together, for their mutual interest, to form a civil state (27). In the sovereign was invested the power to regulate the laws of the newly founded civil state to ensure that proper freedoms for the individual were regulated and assured, especially where

these freedoms appertained to the ownership of property. Naturally, this contract and, therefore, the civil state, has nothing whatsoever to do with "innumerable pieces of paper". Nowhere in Locke do we find the suggestion that mutual profit, in the sense in which Christmas uses the phrase, should be the arbiter of any system of civil law. On the contrary, Locke claimed for his various estimations of right and wrong the ultimate sanction of God, in accordance with his acceptance and understanding of Natural Law. There can be no question of Charles Gould accepting such principles. Indeed, Locke's philosophy, containing as it does his theory of labour value, is absolutely incompatible with the division of labour required by capitalist modes of production in general, or by the San Tomé mine in particular (28).

On the other hand, Adam Smith tended to see the division of labour as the essential ingredient in an efficient and prosperous economy. Thus by referring to Smith, Christmas attempts to plug the gaps that threaten his comparison between Gould and the English political science he thinks is represented by Locke. But he cannot have it both ways. Locke and Smith, it seems to me, make uncomfortable bedfellows; and there is hardly enough common ground between them to justify Christmas's suggestion that they together represent some cohesive tradition in English political thought.

In any case it should be noted that if there is some suggestion of Adam Smith's theories in Nostromo, it can only be traced to Charles Gould in a roundabout manner. The nearest approximation to a Smithsonian viewpoint is to be found in the words of General Barrios.

"That is what Don José says we must do. Be enterprising! Work! Grow rich! To put Montero in a cage is my work; and when that insignificant piece of business is done, then, as Don José wishes us, we shall grow rich, one and all, like so many Englishmen, because it is money that saves a country ..." (p.164)

In Wealth of Nations, Smith argues against the mercantilist system of his day which, he thought, placed an improper emphasis on gold and silver as measures of wealth. Instead, he saw the products of labour as the true indicator of wealth. It is ironic, therefore, that Christmas should bring Adam Smith into the debate, since the wealth produced by Charles Gould is in fact silver. It is, of course, pure speculation, but we might think that there is something of Adam Smith's ideas in General Barrios's naive certainty: "Work! Grow rich!". But it is at least clear that Barrios has got his ideas from Avellanos and not from Gould. Gould is much too tight-lipped to have been spreading propaganda, and there is no reason to suppose that Avellanos has been acting merely as an apologist for the Gould concession. Given that Christmas's theory relies for its validity on the Englishness of the doctrine in question, we might have expected him to show more concrete links between Gould himself and the thinkers he mentions.

We must also question Christmas's suggestion that Nostromo shows us that "everyone's self-interest, however basely calculated or fiercely attained, is bound to end in universal well-being". I have two objections to this. First, such an assertion nicely captures the optimism of Wealth of Nations, but at the same time it utterly fails to come to terms with the manifestly pessimistic tone of the novel we are discussing. In the lawlessness of pre-revolutionary Costaguana it is quite clear that only the restraint of self-interest can produce

peace and prosperity. Obviously it is self-interest that brings Pedrito Montero and the barbarian Sotillo to Sulaco; and by no stretch of the imagination could the ensuing events be described in terms of "universal well-being". Of course, if Christmas is only referring to the end result, the independent Sulaco regime (which he does not make clear), then the hunchbacked photographer, bloodthirsty revolutionary that he is, must imply a denial of the suggestion that all appears to run smoothly.

My second objection is that Smith was able to come to terms with "self-interest" only in relation to economics. He saw it as a benign and controlling force whereby the market was regulated for the good of all. By contrast, we do not see in Nostromo a stable market system, and for much of the novel it is political or military rather than economic forces which reign supreme. In any case the San Tomé mine is a powerful monopoly of which Smith would not have approved.

Christmas claims that in his treatment of this English political tradition, Conrad "pays restrained tribute to a real civilizing force" (29). At the same time, he suggests that this tribute is conditioned by three principal shortcomings. These are worthy of some attention.

The first point is that this English view might bring about a "divisiveness fatal to the values Conrad most cherished" (30). What Christmas has in mind here is the effect of this enlightened self-interested materialism on patriotism (31). He takes for his example the case of Avellanos, whom, he says, puts the interests of the mine before those of Costaguana. But the peculiar circumstances of Costaguana make it a special case. Surely it was never Conrad's intention to suggest that there is something inherently contradictory between the

respective claims of materialism and patriotism? If anything, Avellanos's decision to put the mine first must be taken as a demonstration of the failure of patriotism. In Nostromo there are two sorts of patriot, or more precisely, two sorts of persons who appeal to patriotic sentiment. One type is well represented by the brothers Montero, whose patriotism is but a mask behind which they can hide the more brutal motives for their actions; the other type can be seen in Avellanos, whose patriotism carries more conviction and less hypocrisy. Persons of the latter type, the true patriots, must, like Avellanos, support secession and see their country divided; this not because they put the mine first, but because Costaguana outside of Sulaco is morally unregenerate. When Ribiera's "patriotic undertaking" to reform the country manifestly fails to achieve any of its noble aims, division becomes a necessity if any decency or stability is to be maintained. It is true that Avellanos opts for secession, but he is placed in a situation by which patriotism becomes irreconcilable with his sense of honour and decency. His is a moral code which cannot meet the conflicting demands of the modern world. But we must take his patriotism seriously because having to make that terrible choice kills him.

From this perspective, it seems more sensible to assert that Nostromo demonstrates that material interests are a more effective route to peace, stability and honour, than is patriotic sentiment. There is no place in Costaguana for patriotism. It lacks the historical and cultural traditions in which a European-style patriotism could flourish. As Decoud points out, the word 'patriot' had become hopelessly besmirched in Costaguana; "it had been the cry of dark barbarism,

the cloak of lawlessness, of crimes, of rapacity, of simple thieving" (p.187).

According to Christmas, Conrad's second reservation about the English political tradition, as expressed by the Gould enterprise, was the "moral implications of the blindness to motivation induced among those 'dreamy idealists' who pin their spiritual hopes on materialism but would prefer not to think of it thus" (32). Christmas's real point is that underlying Gould's respectable desire for law and order is the more dangerous assumption that "strength confers the right" (33), which is hidden from the man himself by the blindness that is a corollary of materialism. Apart from the fact that Gould is obviously unclear about his own motives, I find this argument highly suspect. If we are to be consistent about Gould, we must recognize that if he is the champion of the contract Christmas claims him to be, then he must also be a champion of the law; which alone can guarantee it. Thus Gould must see 'right' in legal rather than moral terms. That, perhaps, is his principal failing, precisely as moral considerations are excluded. But this does not mean that his position is one where "strength confers the right" which, in a sense, is a statement of a moral value and one which is antithetical to the demands of a universal legal and judicial code. That Gould is prepared to back the use of force to achieve his ends is at least partially justified by his need to defeat that manifest lawlessness which stands in the way of material progress. I cannot see how a staunch supporter of legality such as Conrad shows himself to be in, for example, The Secret Agent, could be seriously offended by this way of thinking. We are told that Gould had "gone

forth into the senseless fray ... in the defence of the commonest decencies of organized society" (p.365). There is no evidence to suggest that there is any satirical intent behind this proclamation. Conrad makes it quite clear that wealth is a two-edged sword, but that Gould wields it in good faith there can be no doubt.

Christmas's final point is that "perhaps the greatest reservation Conrad has about the political tradition of the Anglo-Saxons is its determinism" (34). This is an interesting suggestion, but impossible either to confirm or deny. Certainly, Christmas is easily able to provide us with evidence that the march of material progress is somehow ineluctable, but he is unable to summon any proofs from the text itself that Conrad himself had any feelings about this one way or another. The important point is that few of the characters are able to leave the silver alone. Thus, if Conrad intends criticism, it is of the way in which we approach material progress, the manner in which we allow ourselves to believe that it is something other than a neutral force, rather than of its inevitability. As Mitchell says, it is a "force for good or evil"; it cannot relieve us of our moral obligations to each other and to the community at large. Mankind being what it is, we must be careful that material temptations do not divide us from one another.

The purpose of this consideration of Christmas's theory of nationality has been to demonstrate that his approach, at least where the Goulds are concerned, is not a particularly useful or convincing one. But, having done so, it is appropriate that I now attempt to outline what I think Nostromo does try to tell us about materialism. Ultimately, Conrad's attitude

to the ideology of those who pin their hopes to the triumph of materialism in the novel is to be found in his portrait of the Goulds' marriage; in the assumptions of the two characters and in their relationship with one another.

Our attention is drawn to an often-quoted conversation which takes place between Charles Gould and his wife, Emilia. Gould has been talking about his backer, the American financier Holroyd, in the course of which he expresses the opinion that "the great silver and iron interests shall survive, and some day shall get hold of Costaguana along with the rest of the world" (p.82). "And do you believe that Charles?", asks Mrs. Gould, "This seems to me the most awful materialism, and - ". Here we detect, for perhaps the first time, that there is a fundamental difference in outlook between them. Charlie's reply, "What's it to me whether his talk is the voice of destiny or a bit of clap-trap eloquence?", might placate his wife, but it should not fool the reader. His reply must be recognized for what it is - an attempt to hide his own convictions by attributing them to Holroyd. Gould's position can be seen clearly enough in the following passage:

"What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security. Anyone can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. That's how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards. That's your ray of hope." His arm pressed her slight form closer to his side for a moment, "And who knows whether in that sense even the San Tomé mine might not become that little rift in the darkness which poor father despaired of ever seeing?"

She glanced up at him with admiration. He was competent; he had given a vast shape to the vagueness of her unselfish ambitions. (p.84)

We need have no illusions about this statement of faith. Gould's first concern is the mine and only the mine. It is his child; a surrogate, perhaps, for the real children his marriage has failed to produce. At the same time he stands quite clear of all charges of avarice or greed. It is implicit from the way in which Gould's coming to Costaguana is presented that his obsession is a function of his determination to reverse his father's failure. Conrad's apparent aim was to create a man who could pin his hopes to material interests, but not in such a way as to suggest a vulgar desire to make money. Gould's relationship with his father, it seems to me, is a subtle psychological device, sketched in by Conrad in order to make this credible. At the same time, however, it is clear that Charles Gould cares very little for the wider social questions arising from his enterprise.

Gould's wife is of a different sort altogether, for she is possessed of a clear humanitarian instinct. Her interest in the affair, as the above passage suggests, is in turning the mine to good use; in making it pay for the improvement of the common lot. Her kindness is made clear by her actions. For example, she takes the Viola's under her wing, making a gift of a pair of spectacles so that the old Garibaldino can read his bible, and saving the Casa Viola from demolition. During the fighting her home becomes a hospital and she herself helps to tend the wounded. Clearly her motives are not selfish but compassionate.

Mrs. Gould is in many ways as important as her husband in terms of the role of the mine. Gould on his own would have been too insular, too inaccessible, to give the San Tomé mine the

importance that it in fact acquires. It is Mrs. Gould who gives the mine a thoroughly dominating role in the affairs of Sulaco; she gives it a social importance. Clearly, she is not merely the wife of an important man, but also a woman of social standing in her own right. The ladies of Sulaco, we are told, "adored Mrs. Gould" (p.67), and it is to be noted that she several times "stands in" for her husband on important occasions (such as the despatch of the forces under General Barrios). The real power and influence of the mine is not to be found at the mine-works or in some bare office, but in the drawing room of the Casa Gould. The mine is effectively transformed from a merely industrial enterprise into an institution; which is where its stability lies. Indeed, Conrad is quite clear on this point. We are told that Mrs. Gould's taking up residence in the town house is "proper and even necessary for the wife of the administrator of such an important institution as the San Tomé mine. For the San Tomé mine was to become an institution..." (p.110).

It is clear, then, what Conrad is after. He wants to make Mrs. Gould a social focus. And he wishes us to see her as an admirable and unimpeachable woman who gives the mining venture a laudable moral tone which it would not otherwise have. But he is clearly not at his best in this, for he is guilty of failing to allow us to see her for ourselves. It is essential, for Conrad's purposes, to show that Mrs. Gould is a natural diplomat and so he reports that she could "converse charmingly, but she was not talkative" (p.67). We do not, however, have the benefit of hearing much of this charming conversation and it is clear that Conrad is actively protecting her from the reader. On the other hand, Conrad's

failure in this respect does not mar the novel as much as it might, for in the end he wants to disassociate his vision of moral and social perfection from the whole grubby business of the mine.

It seems to me that the Goulds' marriage is symbolic. It represents, in the persons of the two characters concerned, a union between morality (kindness and sympathy) and materialism (an inhuman force, but not to be confused with mere money-making). Initially Mrs. Gould seems to endorse the mine, trying to turn her husband's materialism to advantage. As time goes on, however, she begins to feel the full impact of Charles Gould's "subtle conjugal infidelity" (p.365) as he grows increasingly obsessed with the mine. Ultimately, the rift between the two reflects the chasm that separates the ideal of the materialist ethos and the reality of its amoral nature. What happens to Gould is evidence of Conrad's recognition of the way in which an institution has its own impetus and its own rationale. And of the way in which it binds individuals to it. Materialism is not a moral force. But neither is an institution, of which more later.

IV

I do not have space here to deal with the two other political traditions about which Christmas writes in his article, which in any case do not interest me a great deal. I shall be commenting at some length on the importance of Viola in the next chapter, so I do not wish to get involved in a discussion of the character here. As for Christmas's understanding of the Violas, I must confess that I find his arguments so incomprehensible that I am unable to offer even a summary of

them. I do not, however, think that this matters. The novel does not really lend itself to the sort of schematizing Christmas indulges in, as I hope to have demonstrated in examining his treatment of the Goulds. His analysis, it seems to me, is symptomatic of a problem which many critics have had difficulty with: how do we explain the role of Decoud in relation to the broader meaning of the work? We can see the difficulties Christmas gets himself into by attempting to build his analysis around his understanding of Decoud (35). Other commentators have had similar problems (36). But the simple answer, I think, is to desist from trying to force links between this character and the more general themes of the novel. In other words, we can understand Nostromo more easily if we are prepared to allow Decoud a less central role in our deliberations. We might, for example, see him in the following manner.

Decoud, the arch-sceptic, plays the role of commentator, illustrating, in contrast to the other commentator, Mitchell, the failings of the Blanco side of the contest. His suicide demonstrates the dangers of nihilism or scepticism, which is a source of inner weakness. To say this is to say nothing new; it is already a common-place. But his suicide is a part of his story alone; we do not have to see it as an integral part of the novel's overall meaning.

Although Decoud gets himself involved in the secessionist revolution in Costaguana, he does so only because of his love for the loyal daughter of a patriot. It is for the love of Antonia Avellanos that Decoud agrees to set up a Sulaco newsletter, in which he condescends to call Montero a "gran bestia" three times a week. He abides in Sulaco for her sake

in the full knowledge that failure will bring swift and bloody retribution at the hands of the Monterists. He puts forward his bold plan for the separation of Sulaco from the rest of Costaguana for the same reason. Of course I am accepting here that the true motive for his actions is identical with that which he claims for them. Although he may have been more of a patriot than he thought, we can come to no other conclusion precisely because he clearly does not believe in the Blanco cause.

"In those days this town was full of wealth. Those men came to take it. Now the whole land is like a treasure-house, and all these people are breaking into it, whilst we are cutting each other's throats. The only thing that keeps them out is mutual jealousy. But they'll come to an agreement some day - and by the time we've settled our quarrels and become decent and honourable, there'll be nothing left for us. It has always been the same. We are a wonderful people, but it has always been our fate to be" - he did not say "robbed", but added, after a pause - "exploited!"

Mrs. Gould said, "Oh, this is unjust!" And Antonia interjected, "Don't answer him, Emilia. He is attacking me."

"You surely do not think I was attacking Don Carlos!" Decoud answered. (p.174)

Of course he is attacking Don Carlos. His is a tirade against foreign exploitation. His muttered and sarcastic comment, "Oh, yes, we must comfort our friends the speculators" (p.175), in response to Avellanos's suggestion that the outside world should receive encouraging reports, makes it quite clear that Decoud is certainly attacking the likes of Holroyd. But obviously Gould, and even Avellanos, are guilty by association and complicity in aiding and abetting the crime. Interestingly, Decoud's attack upon the intrusion of foreign commercial interests into the affairs of Sulaco is very similar to that of the Monterists. It was at the very beginning of the revolution that General Montero, addressing the officers of

an artillery regiment, had "declared the national honour sold to foreigners" (p.145). Of course, this does not mean that Decoud finds the Monterist camp any more appealing; merely that his intellectual scepticism does not allow him to believe in the aims or pronouncements of either camp. Decoud, alone amongst the characters in Nostromo, seems to recognize that ideologies tend to be the product of perceived self-interest.

Conrad tells us that "The brilliant Costaguanero of the boulevards had died from solitude and want of faith in himself and others" (p.496). I am prepared to accept this statement at face value. As Father Corbelán says of Decoud, "neither the son of his own country nor of any other" (p.198), and the man who is both déraciné and without spiritual and intellectual direction, is bound to lack the stability and endurance which most of us take for granted. At the same time I cannot accept Jonah Raskin's argument that through his criticism of Decoud, Conrad asserts a "belief that man must be involved in social and political life, that he must reject isolation and seek human fellowship" (37). Obviously Decoud does get involved in "social and political life", which fact in itself seems to deny Raskin's argument. I take it that Conrad did not deliberately cloud the issue by making Decoud's suicide causally conditional upon his getting involved in the revolution. But what is much more important is that Conrad was not the man to have delivered such a message.

As Leavis has remarked, Decoud's "consciousness is clearly very closely related to the author's own personal timbre" (38). It is clear too that Decoud can be seen as a spokesman for the Conradian vision. This is not to say that he does not have an independent existence as a character, that

he is merely Conrad's voice clothed in a few largely irrelevant personal details. But it is nevertheless clear that his scepticism markedly expresses the author's own doubts; and also that his suicide provides us with eloquent testimony of Conrad's bouts of depression. As a voluntary exile from the country of his birth, earning a precarious living by writing in a foreign tongue, Conrad was even more rootless than is Decoud. Moreover, Conrad was undeniably a sceptic of the most pitiable kind. Like Decoud, who bewails his projected fate at the hands of Montero, whose lack of conviction drives him to despair in the solitude of a desolate isle, Conrad too was not inured against bouts of self-pity and self-doubt. The point is that Decoud's story is not told to make us wise, to enlighten us against the dangers of scepticism. It is told because it is a tragedy; a tragedy painfully akin to Conrad's own despairing insight. Decoud's fate is a repetition and an affirmation of the message of 'Heart of Darkness': it is essential that man should believe in something beyond himself - even if that is an illusion. But this knowledge in itself is enough to destroy any saving illusions that a man may have and he may find himself, to borrow from the imagery of the novel, cast adrift in the bleak, black emptiness of the Golfo Placido. The earth is reduced finally to that blob of mud whirling through space.

V

I should like now to turn my attention to the figure of Nostromo. I have two reasons for doing so. First, because he is a character who has not been altogether satisfactorily explained by the critics; and, secondly, because I want to put the political fable thesis finally to rest.

If Nostromo's unlawful acquisition of the silver bullion represents the nature and extent of his corruption, it remains unclear precisely why and how this corruption comes about. Hay and Wilding would have us believe the simple explanation that Nostromo is destroyed by the silver itself, or by "sheer wealth" (39). On the surface, this argument may look convincing enough. The story of ghosts on the Azuera seems to point the way; the novel becomes a simple moral fable in which the greedy get their just deserts. But it simply will not do. The Azuera business is a red-herring.

In Part First, Nostromo is, with one exception, the epitome of the Conradian hero. He is a fabulous figure; handsome, energetic, fearless and loyal. Unlike Heyst, the hero of Victory, he is not a thinker but a man of action, brilliant and adventurous. However, apart from his incorruptibility, of which virtually everybody is assured, his most striking characteristics are his vanity and his obsessive need for public acclaim. Our attention is drawn to a much criticised scene in which the remarkable Capataz encounters his Morenita.

"A knife!" he demanded at large, holding her firmly by the shoulder.

Twenty blades flashed out together in the circle. A young man in holiday attire, bounding in, thrust one in Nostromo's hand and bounded back into the ranks, very proud of himself. Nostromo had not even looked at him.

"Stand on my foot," he commanded the girl, who, suddenly subdued, rose lightly, and when he had her up, encircling her waist, her face near to his, he pressed the knife into her little hand.

"No, Morenita! You shall not put me to shame," he said. "You shall have your present; and so that everyone should know who is your lover to-day, you may cut all the silver buttons off my coat." (p.129)

Michael Wilding has quite rightly commented that this is like a scene from Carmen. It is a poor effort: the prose is

unusually clumsy, particularly in the sentence which begins "Stand on my foot"; and it is a cheaply theatrical scene unworthy of Conrad. There are, nevertheless, important clues in it as to how we should take Nostromo. Wilding, for example, suggests that there is a "damaging over-insistence on the silver" in Nostromo (40), but in this case it is very necessary that the Capataz should have silver buttons. The message at least is clear. To the incorruptible Nostromo, a brilliant reputation is of far greater value than money. And he would not wish to lose the adoration he clearly receives from the crowd assembled around him.

Jacques Berthoud writes:

I have no intention of denying, of course, that Nostromo takes the silver because he wants it for himself. But there is much more to this than vulgar greed. It is a direct consequence of the way he has lived his life: a demonstration of the fragility of an integrity founded on vanity. (41).

I think Berthoud is wrong to be reticent about denying that Nostromo wants the silver for himself, but he is quite right to point to Nostromo's vanity as the primary cause of the man's corruption. If Nostromo is transformed from a hero into a thief, the one quality in him which remains unaltered is his desire to be well thought of. This, it seems to me, is an important point and we do need to examine it in some detail if we are to understand why Nostromo does become a thief.

The transformation from hero to thief culminates in the dramatic scene at the end of chapter seven in Part Three of the novel.

Nostromo woke up from a fourteen hours' sleep, and arose full length from his lair in the long grass. He stood knee deep amongst the whispering undulations of the green blades with the lost air of a man just born into the

world. Handsome, robust, and supple, he threw back his head, flung his arms open and stretched himself with a slow twist of the waist and a leisurely growling yawn of white teeth, as natural and free from evil in the moment of waking as a magnificent and unconscious wild beast. Then, in the suddenly steadied glance fixed upon nothing from under a thoughtful frown, appeared the man. (pp. 411-2)

I do not wish to say much about this because the passage speaks for itself. It is, however, clear that Nostromo has suddenly become conscious of, or about, something - but what?

On the surface, the explanation for this sudden transformation would appear to be that Nostromo experiences a sudden attack of class-consciousness. Gareth Jenkins writes of Nostromo:

his growth in political independence follows organically from his consciousness of having had his reputation betrayed by the oligarchy in their own interests at the very moment he imagined he was asserting his loyalty to the utmost. (42)

The argument here is that Nostromo is awakened to the fact that he has been exploited by the failure of his mission to save the silver from Sotillo. This view is supported by the evidence of his very name - Nostromo - which is a corruption of the Italian, nostre uomo or, literally, "our man"; it is a name which seems to symbolize the role of lackey which he plays to the rich and powerful. There is also the evidence of Nostromo's own perception of the affair.

Decoud was the only one who cared whether he fell into the hands of the Monterists or not, the Capataz reflected bitterly. And that merely would be an anxiety for his own sake. As to the rest, they neither knew nor cared. What he had heard Giorgio Viola say once was very true. Kings, ministers, aristocrats, the rich in general, kept the people in poverty and subjection; they kept them as they kept dogs, to fight and hunt for their service. (p.415).

The assumption, then, is that the failure of the attempt to save the silver brings to Nostromo's attention the fact that paymasters like Don Carlos care nothing for the men they use. Thus Nostromo becomes enlightened and his consciousness of the world becomes politicised. This argument has the advantage of explaining Nostromo's subsequent acts of thieving; as the photographer in the final scene says "Do not forget that we want money for our work. The rich must be fought with their own weapons" (p.562).

All of this seems to hang together nicely. But it will not stand closer examination. As Berthoud points out, "to consider Nostromo as a noble savage undone by capitalist exploitation is to fall short of Conrad's conception. Whether consciously or not, Nostromo has been in collusion with his own exploiters ..." (43). Precisely: Nostromo knows perfectly well what he is taking on when he agrees to try to save the silver. He uses his "exploiters" as they use him. He needs them in order to get to the centre of the action; and it is a bargain he strikes with his own perceived interests fully in mind.

When there is still time to change his mind about the mission, and indeed every reason for doing so, Teresa Viola laments Nostromo's slavishness before his rich masters.

"They have turned your head with their praises," gasped the sick woman. "They have been paying you with words. Your folly shall betray you into poverty, misery, starvation. The very leperos shall laugh at you - the great Capataz." (p.257)

Again, when Nostromo is aboard the lighter with Decoud, and at a time when the mission has not yet failed, he tells his companion that the loss of the treasure would not impoverish Charles Gould very much, and he continues:

"And yet the day before yesterday, we have been fighting to save it from the mob, and tonight I am sent out with it into this darkness, where there is no wind to get away with ... Ha! Ha! Well, I am going to make it the most famous and desperate affair of my life - wind or no wind. I shall be talked about when the little children are grown up and the grown men are old." (p.265)

Clearly Nostromo knows very well what is being asked of him, and he also knows that those who have charged him with the mission care little for his personal fate. But for the sake of an unassailable reputation he takes a great gamble and stakes everything upon its success. He chooses the danger and the excitement, with everything but money to play for, rather than fetch a priest for a dying woman. It is not the psychology of a lackey that makes him go, but his unbridled and unbounded ego. The gamble fails. His conceit, however, will not allow him to recognize that he has been simply foolish. Robbed of his self-esteem and tortured by the fear that Señora Viola's prophecy will come true, he turns his bitterness against the rich. Even the most amateur psychologist can see that this is a simple matter. Nostromo is like a gambler who loses everything at the roulette table and immediately suspects that the game has been fixed. In short, Nostromo's class-consciousness is merely a rationalisation to hide, or rather to prevent, the collapse of his self-esteem. Failure fractures his whole personality, built as it is upon the self-image produced by the mirror of other's eyes. Nostromo's sense of self is inevitably inadequate to the task of dealing with the conflicts in the society from which he gets his identity. The mirror cracks from end to end and Nostromo goes mad. Conrad is superb on this. In the scene in which Nostromo meets Monygham, Conrad chronicles the man's growing fears and doubts in a manner which exposes his

temporary loss of contact with reality. At the blasted barracks, the eerie shadow of Hirsch's corpse seems to throw the narrative into the realms of ghosts, ghouls and supernatural horror.

The whole enormous ruined barrack of a place, unfinished, without ceilings under its lofty roof, was pervaded by the smoke swaying to and fro in the faint cross draughts playing in the obscurity of many lofty rooms and barnlike passages. Once one of the swinging shutters came against the wall with a single sharp crack, as if pushed by an impatient hand. A piece of paper scurried out from somewhere, rustling along the landing. The man, whoever he was, did not darken the lighted doorway. Twice the Capataz, advancing a couple of steps out of his corner, craned his neck in the hope of catching sight of what he could be at, so quietly, in there. But every time he saw only the distorted shadow of broad shoulders and bowed head. He was doing apparently nothing, and stirred not from the spot, as though he were meditating - or, perhaps, reading a paper. And not a sound issued from the room.
(pp.423-4)

This is a nicely sinister passage. But it is not done merely for effect. Like the best horror movies there are subtle hints of the inexplicable. But the horror is not disembodied for it is in Nostromo's head. It is Nostromo who is virtually petrified with fear. In a beautiful ironic twist, the fearless Capataz runs away from the shadow. Of course, when he discovers the truth of the matter, his mind becomes more settled. His personality, nevertheless, has received a blow from which it will never recover. He has lost a great deal of his confidence in himself. He feels threatened, persecuted and betrayed.

In all of this there is the added confusion of the seemingly supernatural powers of the silver itself. Conrad, wrongly I think, encourages us to believe that Nostromo has struck some bargain with an evil force. The silver becomes

mephistopheles; Nostromo becomes Faust. It is this that has encouraged critics to see Nostromo as a crude fable. Even Berthoud says of Nostromo that "His is the classical bargain, the exchange of a soul for a certain number of pieces of silver, and it exacts the classical consequences" (44). Of course he is right. Nevertheless, Conrad's exploration of Nostromo's mental distress, of his struggle to come to terms with a world collapsing about him, cannot be explained in terms of classical tales. On the contrary, Conrad's is a thoroughly modern conception, for it attempts to explore the way in which the individual's sense of identity interacts with the forces of society and history. This is a theme Conrad takes up with greater clarity in Under Western Eyes.

It is from the closing pages of the novel that we finally come to understand precisely why Nostromo steals the silver bullion. In his attempt to confess to Mrs. Gould, Nostromo tells her that

"Decoud took four. Four ingots. Why? Picardia! To betray me? How could I give back the treasure with four ingots missing? They would have said I purloined them. The doctor would have said that. Alas! it holds me yet!" (p.559)

By taking four ingots and by committing suicide, Decoud has unwittingly betrayed Nostromo. For the latter there is no taking back the treasure. It has to remain concealed, its location known only to him; and a running sore of bitterness makes it easy for him actually to purloin the bullion. Four were missing and in his eyes this, if known, would destroy his reputation. If more were to go missing it would make no difference at all.

A part of Nostromo's story, then, chronicles the psychology of vanity. But vanity alone does not destroy him. A second

cause of his downfall is hidden beneath the complexities of Nostromo, and in the next chapter I shall be discussing this and the part played in it by the garibaldino, Viola.

VI

Eloise Knapp Hay writes of Nostromo:

The disease of a society sacrificing itself for material interests had been portrayed by Flaubert, Zola, James, and Hardy (to mention only a few), but, as Conrad saw, the blight had before it vast stretches of virgin ground to devastate. (45)

This is an interesting comment, though rather puzzling. If Conrad saw the devastation which materialism could or does cause, why did he not show it to us in Nostromo? It is merely stated that material interests will weigh heavily on the backs of the people, we do not actually see it doing so. The predicament of a society governed by material interests would take us beyond the time-span of the novel. What is depicted is a period of transition. We see, as it were, the finale of an age; we are shown a South American country finally pulling itself free from its colonial past (though not completely because Holroyd remains). But we are not allowed to peer beyond the horizon at a new order.

It is interesting too that Hay compares Conrad's obvious concern with materialism with the similar concerns of those other writers she mentions. In my view, Conrad's work in Nostromo is of a different order altogether. It may be a relatively simple task to criticise the society that one lives in for its shallowness, its materialism and its lack of spiritual direction; but it is not so easy to show us how it happened, and that is precisely what Conrad achieves in Nostromo. He gives us, not the opportunity to agree that this or that is a shame or an outrage or whatever, but the opportunity to choose

for ourselves between two distinct historical alternatives. Which is better, Gould's world or Montero's? Indeed, Nostromo poses the question: is it possible to progress beyond the brutish without incurring the penalty of gross and inhuman materialism?

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See, for example, Norman Sherry, Conrad's Western World (1971).
2. F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (1948), p.191.
3. Ibid., p.200.
4. Ibid., p.201.
5. C.B. Cox, Joseph Conrad: The Modern Imagination (1974), p.69.
6. Ibid., p.77.
7. Eloise Knapp Hay, The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad (1963), Chicago, p.170.
8. Ibid., p.202.
9. Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad (1959), p.310.
10. Robert Penn Warren, "Nostromo", in Sewanee Review, LIX (Summer 1951), p.377.

11. See Michael Wilding, "The Politics of Nostromo", in Essays in Criticism, XVI (October 1966), No.4, pp.441-456.

There are two striking similarities between this article and Hay's Nostromo chapter. First, their approaches to the Garibaldino, Viola, are almost identical, both dismissively characterizing him in terms of the failure of either "liberal nationalism" or "abstract liberty". Second, Hay claims that Conrad chose to name his fictional republic Costaguana "after the bird excrement used in making explosives". Curiously, Wilding makes the very same mistake, calling Costaguana "the coast of gull droppings", and, somewhat less politely, "shit-coast" (this in a later contribution to Essays in Criticism). In fact, the word for bird excrement is guano, as distinct from guana which means, variously, palm or lizard (as in Iguana).

12. Ibid., p.442.
13. Ibid., p.443.
14. Ibid., p.450.
15. Ibid., p.448.
16. Ivo Vidan, in a reply to Wilding's article - "The Critical Forum", Essays in Criticism, XVII, No.3, p.392.
17. Leavis, op.cit., p.191.
18. Juliet McLauchlan, "The Critical Forum", Essays in Criticism, XVII, No.3, p.398.
19. Vidan. op.cit., p.392.
20. Wilding, op.cit., p.456.
21. McLauchlan, op.cit., p.398.
22. Vidan agrees with Wilding that the characters are isolated from one another, but he does not see this as a defect in the novel. He argues that this isolation is an intentional feature of a novel which concentrates on the divisiveness of capitalism. Naturally, I disagree with Vidan for the same reason that I disagree with Wilding, on the grounds that capitalism as such is not a central issue in Nostromo.
23. Wilding, op.cit., p.445,
24. Peter Christmas, "Conrad's Nostromo: A tale of Europe", in Literature and History, XI:I, pp.59-81.
25. Ibid., p.61.
26. Ibid., pp.61-62.
27. See John Locke, Two Treatises of Civil Government, (Dent, 1924), particularly in Book II (An essay concerning the true origin, extent and end of civil government), Chapter VII, "Of the beginning of Political Societies", and Chapter XIX, "Of the Dissolution of Government".
28. The theory of labour value which was put forward originally by Thomas Aquinas and was repeated by Locke, held that goods had value insofar as human labour was expended in their production. It was argued, therefore, that a man had a right of ownership over everything which he had himself produced. Whatsoever...he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes his property (John Locke, Ibid., Book II, Chapter V, "Of Property".) Since Gould actually produces no silver himself, he can have no rights of ownership over the mine's product.
29. Christmas, op. cit., p.62.
30. Ibid., p.66.

31. Christmas's approach does not permit a separate consideration of enlightened self-interest and materialism. These are lumped together under the umbrella phrase "the English theoretical contribution to political science".
32. Ibid., p.66.
33. Ibid., p.66.
34. Ibid., p.68
35. I am assuming here that the desire to make Decoud more central to the text than he need be is at the root of Christmas's theory of nationality and political tradition (French scepticism; English materialism; and Italian libertarianism).
36. See, for example, Gareth Jenkins, "Conrad's Nostromo and History", Literature and History, No. 6, Autumn 1977, pp.138-178.
37. Jonah Raskin, "Nostromo: The argument from revision", Essays in Criticism, XVIII:2 (April 1968), p.191.
38. Leavis, op. cit., pp,199-200.
39. Wilding, op,cit., p.451.
40. Ibid., p.446.
41. Jacques Berthoud, Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase (1978),P.124.
42. Jenkins, op. cit., p.170.
43. Berthoud, op. cit., p.120.
44. Ibid., p.124.
45. Hay, op. cit., p.165.

CHAPTER THREE

The Politics of Costaguana

I

In the previous Chapter, I suggested that the responsibility for Nostromo's corruption does not lie with himself alone, and that a significant proportion of the blame must lie with the old Garibaldino, Viola. I have tried to demonstrate that Nostromo's class-consciousness is merely a rationalization of his psychological condition. I shall now argue that it is not merely vanity that crushes the illustrious Capataz, but also an awakening of a self-consciousness that is unwittingly engendered by Viola's libertarian socialism.

The most obvious feature of the relationship between the two men must surely be the "father and son" aspect, which is stressed throughout. Viola is constantly reminding us that his own son, had he lived, would have been such as Nostromo appears to be. Thus it is established from the outset that in their respective characters and beliefs there is a sort of continuity which makes one the natural heir of the other. This pattern of inheritance is featured throughout the novel and it is clear that Nostromo too has his natural heir.

It is noticeable that in Nostromo even the more minor characters are introduced into the text long before their necessary participation in the plot. We may consider, for example, the figure Hirsch. His part in the plot is confined to his actions during the mission to save the silver and his subsequent treatment at the hands of Sotillo. He is, however, introduced to the reader in the drawing room of the Casa Gould long before these events take place. There is, on the other hand, one minor character in the novel who is treated very differently. He is the marxist photographer

who appears on stage, as it were, and at a critical moment in the dramatic issue, without any previous mention. Nor does he play any discernible part in the plot. We can hardly fail to notice that the photographer makes his entrance only and precisely at the moment when Nostromo is due to make his exit. It seems clear, therefore, that Conrad wishes us to recognize a subtle and demeaning connection between this character and Nostromo.

Conrad describes the photographer thus:

There was no one with the wounded man but the pale photographer, small, frail, bloodthirsty, the hater of capitalists, perched on a high stool near the head of the bed with his knees up and his chin in his hands.

And -

He did not insist, remaining huddled up on the stool, shock-headed, wildly hairy, like a hunch-backed monkey. (p.562)

Evidently, the photographer is a parody figure. Conrad makes no attempt to understand the fellow, much as if we should take it for granted that all who hate capitalists or capitalism must necessarily be like this. And this is in marked contrast to the very much more serious treatment he allows to, for example, the Professor in The Secret Agent. At the same time it is clear that Conrad will allow us no sympathy for this character not merely because he dislikes him himself, but also because he wishes us to have no doubts about the depths to which Nostromo has fallen. And if we consider the three characters - Viola, Nostromo and the photographer - together, we can see that there is a subtle chain of development which begins with a seemingly honourable desire for liberty and ends with blood-thirsty revolutionism.

Before we consider the implications of this political

schema, it is first necessary to establish the precise manner in which Viola's class-consciousness can have produced self-consciousness in Nostromo. We must begin by recognizing that there is in Viola's world-view an implicit assault on the assumptions of Nostromo's exalted ego. Since Nostromo is neither a king, nor an aristocrat, nor rich, it follows that, numbered amongst the "People", he must inevitably be a fool or a "dog", as long as he continues to make his fame under the orders of his rich taskmasters. That is why he ignores Viola's pronouncements upon the rich in the early part of the novel. He cannot despise the rich and isolate himself like Viola, since they are a necessary precondition to those glorious victories demanded by his vanity.

As the novel progresses, however, Nostromo becomes more and more aware of the implications of Viola's political convictions for his own view of himself and his social role. Whereas he had previously been content to do his "duty" without questioning his character or personal worth, Nostromo slowly becomes aware of the conflict between his self-image and Viola's world-view. The height of this challenge to his view of himself comes when Signora Viola berates him from her sick-bed as an errand boy for the rich, and the failure of his attempt to save the silver should be seen merely as the final nail in the coffin of his unconscious pride. With failure, the necessity to reject Viola's class-conscious beliefs is removed, the upshot of which is that Nostromo must come to terms not with a revaluation of the world, but with a revaluation of his own place within it. The extent to which his new attitude to life is not truly class-conscious can be measured by the fact that he thinks of his predicament in terms of personal betrayal.

Whereas Viola is self-denying, if not disinterested, in his revolutionary zeal, Nostromo is concerned only with himself. What he goes through is a process which converts an unthinking pride in doing one's duty into a self-conscious terror at the thought of being supposed a fool.

In the previous chapter I touched upon Conrad's failure to make credible the love relationship between Nostromo and the Viola girls. Evidently the fault lies with Conrad's lack of interest in what he is writing about, but if this is so, and the love interest has no intrinsic importance, it is unclear precisely why it is included. My view is that Conrad's sole intention was to engineer a situation in which Viola might credibly shoot Nostromo. Since the old man does not know that Nostromo is a thief, without honour or moral fortitude, we cannot pretend that he kills him in the cause of justice. The event is a pure accident. Its significance, therefore, lies in Conrad's need to create a dramatic symbol for the moral destruction Viola has wrought upon his "son".

The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', amongst other things, chronicles a change in the world of men. The tale draws a picture of a human world which is changing for the worse. In the first chapter, we are told that Singleton is a "lonely relic of a devoured and forgotten generation". The passage continues thus:

He stood, still strong, as ever unthinking... The men who could understand his silence were gone - those men who knew how to exist beyond the pale of life and within sight of eternity. They had been strong, as those are strong who know neither doubts nor hopes. They had been impatient and enduring, turbulent and devoted, unruly and faithful... Men hard to manage, but easy to inspire; voiceless men - but men enough to scorn in their hearts the sentimental voices that bewailed the hardness of their fate. (1)

This is a telling description of the 'old' generation of men, represented in the novel by Singleton. Such characters are Conradian heroes of a sort; not perhaps idealized by him, but certainly romanticized. Starkly contrasted with this breed of men, we have also in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' a new and far less commendable generation of men, represented by Donkin. We are told that the successors to the Singleton breed are

The grown-up children of a discontented earth. They are less naughty, but less innocent; less profane, but perhaps also less believing; and if they had learned how to speak they have also learned how to whine. (2)

As I have said, Donkin is the character chosen to represent this breed of men, and he is a brilliant, though highly prejudiced creation. No doubt Conrad came to know his type during his long experience at sea.

He was the man that cannot steer, that cannot splice, that dodges the work on dark nights; that, aloft, holds on frantically with both arms and legs, and swears at the wind, the sleet, the darkness; the man who curses the sea while others work. The man who is the last out and the first in when all hands are called... The pet of philanthropists and self-seeking landlubbers. The sympathetic and deserving creature that knows all about his rights, but knows nothing of courage, of endurance, and of unexpressed faith, of the unspoken loyalty that knits together a ship's company. The independent offspring of the ignoble freedom of the slums full of disdain and hate for the austere servitude of the sea. (3)

This, it seems to me, is typical of Conrad at his worst. Such apparently lofty, self-righteous preaching is intrusive and unpalatable. We can very well see for ourselves that Donkin is a rascal, selfish, self-centred and self-indulgent. By his refusal to do his share of the work he makes life harder for others. Nevertheless, in his human frailty, fear and feebleness, he is owed more sympathy than Conrad is prepared to

give him. Donkin is evidently a seaman not by choice nor by natural inclination, but by necessity. He is a victim of an economic system which dictates his fate, subjecting him to a harsh life for which he is hardly fitted. Surely it is understandable that he should bewail his fate and seek to rebel against it? We cannot deny that Donkin is right when he seeks to persuade the rest of the crew that there is a great deal of injustice in the fact that the ship's officers and owners get all the profit and the perquisites, even though it is the common seaman who does all the hard and dangerous work. Conrad's eloquent description of the harshness of the seaman's life cuts two ways. It is clearly an attempt to show the seaman at his best, but it also shows the shipowners at their worst. By denying to Donkin even the merest shred of decency, Conrad is issuing an invitation to renewed exploitation. Unnecessary suffering, he seems to say, is unreservedly good for you. And those who seek to end it, whether socialists, liberals, or plain "philanthropists", are no more than scroungers trying to shirk their responsibilities under cover of a rhetoric which appeals to our sense of fair play.

By the time he wrote Nostromo, Conrad's attitude towards socialism had matured, and in the later work his approach is much more subtle. Where Donkin succeeds Singleton, Nostromo succeeds Viola, but the relationships between the two pairs of men is somewhat different. Whereas Singleton and Donkin are polarized characters in every way, Nostromo is a direct heir to Viola and much that is unsatisfactory in the former is the result of mis-placed virtues in the latter. Viola, of course, is very similar to Singleton in many ways except that he has political convictions where Singleton has none. These

convictions are simple, heartfelt and generous sentiments for the most part, but in passing them on to Nostromo they corrupt and are corrupted.

The character of Viola himself is a major concession from Conrad to the nobler claims of socialist thought (4).

However, although the tone in which the old man is presented to us seems admiring, the implications of the plotting, along with some of the imagery, indicate that Conrad thought Viola's views mistaken and harmful (as I hope I have shown). Quite apart from the damaging effect he has upon Nostromo, there are two implicit criticisms of Viola in the novel.

First, old Giorgio is a defeated man, disillusioned and exiled.

This stern devotion to a cause had cast a gloom upon Giorgio's old age. It cast a gloom because the cause seemed lost. Too many kings and emperors flourished yet in the world which God had meant for the people.
(p.31)

All the bloodshed and all of the fighting to which Voila has been a party has achieved nothing for the poor. This may be contrasted with the much less noble in conception, though nevertheless significant, achievements of the Goulds.

A second criticism of Viola is that he lives in the past; a past of kings and ministers and aristocrats. We are told that the old Spanish road is "the only remaining vestige of a fact and name left by that royalty old Giorgio Viola hated" (p.48). His argument, unlike Nostromo's, is not with capitalists. His enemy is Cavour, not Rothschild; his hero Garibaldi, not Marx. His is an old-world and austere republicanism, hardly tailored to the needs and issues of the modern world. And yet he does not abandon the radical rhetoric now almost half a century out of date. Significantly,

his eyesight is failing him - a symbol of his increasing blindness to the real world.

If we examine more closely the differences between Viola and Nostromo we can see all the more clearly the whole extent to which the old man's revolutionism is corrupted. First, there is in Viola that much vaunted notion of Conrad's - devotion to duty. Early in the novel we find Viola castigating his wife for moaning about Nostromo's absence during the rioting.

"Peace, woman! Where's the sense if it? There's his duty" (p.17)

Although he may have political notions beyond the scope of Singleton's limited horizons, Viola shares with the old seaman an understanding of the word "duty"; unlike Nostromo who, as the reader knows, is motivated by other things.

A little further on in the text, we read of Viola that a smile of contemptuous relief came upon his lips of an old fighter with a leonine face. These were not a people striving for justice, but thieves. Even to defend his life against them was a sort of degradation for a man who had been one of Garibaldi's immortal thousand in the conquest of Sicily. He had an immense scorn for this outbreak of scoundrels and leperos, who did not know the meaning of the word "liberty". (pp.20-21)

With hindsight we can hardly fail to notice just how ironic are Viola's thoughts at this time, for they become applicable later in the novel to his own "son", Nostromo. Nostromo is not a man striving for justice or "liberty" either, but he is a thief.

Although outwardly their doctrines are the same, the true difference between the two characters can be seen most clearly in the thoughts attributed to the Chief Engineer, who

appreciated the moral influence of the old Garibaldino upon his countrymen. His austere, old-world Republicanism had a severe, soldier-

like standard of faithfulness and duty, as if the world were a battlefield where men had to fight for the sake of universal love and brotherhood, instead of a more or less large share of the booty. (p.313)

Here we have set down all those positive qualities which are lacking in Nostromo: faithfulness and duty and a desire for universal love and brotherhood. We may suspect that the photographer who comes last in the line of succession fights for a "more or less large share of booty".

The implication, then, of the relationship between Viola and Nostromo is that the tradition and rhetoric of nineteenth-century liberal republicanism lives on, changed and corrupted by the passage of time, used and abused by the new generation of men for their own purposes. Nostromo, of course, is a victim of all this, a hopelessly confused and innocently misled but nevertheless vital part of a chain of ideological development that stretches through him from Viola to the photographer. Thus, violent class-hatred is the legacy of Viola's noble and selfless battle for liberty and the "people". As is so often the case in Conrad's fiction, the name itself carries meaning: it is but a short step from "Viola" to "violate".

Amongst all of this we may detect Conrad's dismissal of the ideals of universal brotherhood and love. In a letter to Cunningham-Graham, he writes:

I cannot admit the idea of fraternity, not so much because I believe it impracticable, but because its propaganda...tends to weaken the national sentiment, the preservation of which is my concern...

Franchement, what would you think of an attempt to promote fraternity amongst people living in the same street, I don't even mention two neighbouring streets? Two ends of the same street. (5)

In context, what Conrad means when he claims that the propaganda of the idea of fraternity tends to weaken the national sentiment, is that such propaganda tends to deny the desirable cultural differences between nations; thus weakening the sense of national identity. This theme, however, is hardly to be found in Conrad's fiction which, in terms of the characters within it, is splendidly international in outlook. What we do find in his novels, however, is the implication that the rhetoric of universal brotherhood can cause divisions within nations; and indeed, one could choose to read the above passage in such a way as to support this claim. The implications of which I speak are best expressed in the sea-stories. The inference, particularly in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', is that comradeship is useful, nay imperative, on board ship, but only in the face of an enemy - in this instance, the sea. But on land, brotherhood is only really effective where it is divisive, for there one's enemy is human. This is the essence of Conrad's opposition to Viola, for whom the narrator seems to show pity and contempt as well as restrained admiration. The Garibaldino's propaganda requires that he rejects a part of the national community and makes them the enemy. His attack on kings and ministers is therefore divisive, untrue and dangerous, for it blinds men to those properly moral issues which they should be dealing with; issues that for Conrad were and are inseparable from nationhood. It is on this issue that Peter Christmas is utterly wrong. It is not materialism that is divisive, but idealism. What happens in Nostromo is that the finer and more noble aspects of Viola's creed are abandoned or corrupted, leaving only the propaganda of class-hatred. The photographer must be defined

not by his fellow feeling with the down-trodden unfortunates, but by his blood-thirsty hatred of capitalists.

II

If Conrad's treatment of *Nostromo* and Viola seems to imply a rejection of a class-orientated ideology, it is a curious fact that several commentators have chosen to look at *Nostromo* as if the novel itself were structured around a very similar ideology. In other words, they suppose that the social and historical changes we see in the novel can be understood in terms of a broadly marxist historiography. On the surface there appears to be some merit in this approach, so we need to look very carefully at the relationship between marxist doctrine and the social and historical events which go to make up *Nostromo*.

But first I want to dismiss Irving Howe's eccentric theory that the novel somehow reflects the ideas of Leon Trotsky. Howe writes that

Nostromo verifies, in the limited way a novel can verify anything, Leon Trotsky's theory of a "permanent revolution", a theory which sketches the problems of a backward country in an industrial world. The semi-colonial nation, writes Trotsky, suffers from a sickly blend of primitivism and sophistication, a severance from its indigenous past and a crippling distance from the industrial present. (6)

He goes on to state Trotsky's theory that a native ruling class (7) cannot carry out the tasks of a bourgeois revolution and it therefore falls to the proletariat- telescoping the bourgeois and the socialist revolutions into one. This, writes Howe, is a "paradigm of what happens in *Nostromo*". In fact this is precisely what does not happen in *Nostromo*. Trotsky argues that a bourgeois-democratic revolution made by the proletariat would tend to become a socialist revolution,

since political power would inevitably gravitate to the class which had played the greatest part in promoting it. But in Nostromo, of the men in Sulaco with political and economic power, not one is a proletarian. Hernandez, for example, who ends the novel as Minister for War, had previously been a small-scale farmer and then a bandit. Don Juste Lopez comes from the more or less aristocratic class composed of the old Spanish families. And so on. Furthermore, if a socialist revolution had taken place, there could have been no "serious labour troubles"; Gould would no longer control the San tomé mine (which ends the novel still under a capitalist mode of production); and there would be no need for a photographer who hates capitalists. In addition to this I might point out that the role played by the Sulaco proletariat in the revolution is very different from that played by a native proletariat in Trotsky's model. In the novel there are two distinct proletarian groups. If we consider the native (Indian) workers of the San Tomé mine, it is obvious that although they march on the town, their object is to save Gould from Pedrito Montero. In this they succeed, but it is their only contribution to the revolution. Thus their actions are not revolutionary, but reactionary - in the sense that they seek to restore the regime they are accustomed to; they attempt to promote stasis and not change. The other proletarian group involved in the revolution, the imported labour of the province, does not get itself involved in the struggle in the cause of socialism, for they are made exceptional as proletarians by virtue of their being "foreign". As Conrad tells us, the faithfulness of the Basque and Italian workmen is the result of the fact that "Amongst the cries of the mob not the least loud

had been the cry of death to foreigners" (p.307).

I feel confident in asserting, then, that the events which take place in Nostromo have nothing at all to do with the doctrines of Leon Trotsky. If there were to be a socialist revolution in Costaguana, it would occur beyond the timespan of the novel. This is to assume, of course, that the revolution we do read of in Nostromo is a bourgeois-democratic revolution. This in itself is an arguable point, depending as it does on an acceptance of a marxist theory of historical change. The question to which we must address ourselves, therefore, is this: to what extent do the events in Costaguana lend themselves to a marxist interpretation?

This precise question has been explored by surprisingly few Conrad scholars, but one in particular, Avrom Fleishman, offers the most exact formulation of a class-theory of the novel's major events. Not only does Fleishman claim that the "characterization of Gould can be read as a parable of the sociology of capitalism, in its classical formulation by Weber, Sombart and Veblen" (8), but he also claims that Nostromo is a representative of the proletariat.

Nostromo's career represents the history of an entire class, the proletariat - its enlistment and exploitation in the industrialization of the country, its entry into the separatist revolution (fighting for class interests not entirely its own) its growth of self-consciousness and discovery of an independent political role, its temptation by the materialistic drives of capitalism, and its purgation by traditional idealists in its own camp. (9)

Although there is, of course, rather more to Fleishman's analysis than this (I do not wish to be unfair), nevertheless it is clear that he thinks a marxist analysis appropriate to the history of Costaguana. It is indeed rather odd that he should have been satisfied with this approach to the novel, given that the single most important argument in his book is

that Conrad's politics lie within a tradition quite different from the class-orientated theories of Marx or from those of his bourgeois predecessors. He would have been better served had he argued, as I shall, that it is thoroughly misleading to approach Nostromo with the intention of analysing the politics within it on the basis of the operation of classes or the activity of their "representatives".

On the surface, the events in Costaguana bear all the signs of constituting what communist thinkers are fond of calling a "bourgeois-democratic revolution". In the marxist school of thought, the business of such a revolution must necessarily be the overthrow of feudal society and the transferral of political power from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie, completing a process of historical change which begins with changes in the mode of material production. Marx writes:

In the bourgeoisie, two stages can be distinguished: that in which it formed itself into a class under the feudal system and absolute monarchy, and that in which, already formed into a class, it overthrew feudalism and the monarchy, in order to turn society into bourgeois society. (10)

Is this what happens in Nostromo? The simple answer is that it is not. It could be argued that the concentration of material interests in the novel through leading industrial and commercial figures like Gould, the Chief Engineer of the railroads, and Captain Mitchell, implies the consolidation of a distinct class. There are, however, several problems with this supposition. First, of the characters mentioned, only Gould is an employer of labour and an owner of means of production. The other two are merely high-ranking employees who, strictly speaking, can make no claim to ownership of any means of production. Second, only one of these figures,

again Charles Gould, could be termed a 'native' bourgeois, whilst the others cannot have a personal stake in the country and their class-interests can only temporarily be convergent with his. Third, and much the most important point, is the odd fact that Gould and the industrial faction in general are not fighting against, but alongside, the aristocracy in Sulaco. The "party of progress" which in the province effects the bourgeois-democratic revolution (and it is certainly that in terms of end results), is in fact a broad alliance between the industrialists led by Gould, the aristocracy led by Don José Avellanós, and the foreign workmen under the leadership of Nostromo. All of these classes are, of course, relatively small, although they are very much wealthier than the bulk of the population. In class terms, the only conceivable opponent to this coalition, therefore, is the peasantry.

Marx insisted that the peasants are conservative in outlook.

Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history. (II)

This much, it must be admitted, is true of the peasant population in Costaguana, for inspired by a hatred of foreigners (who after all constitute a new aristocracy of labour in their own land) they attempt to prevent industrial progress. However, at the same time, and according to Marx, they do not form a class for historical purposes.

In so far as there is merely a local inter-connexion amongst these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not form a class. (12)

The crux of Marx's argument is that a class must be conscious of itself as a class, before it can be a class in the

revolutionary sense. For him, this condition could not be satisfied by a peasantry tied to the land on which it works, and therefore perpetually parochial in outlook. Thus the peasantry cannot be revolutionary. However, this state of affairs leaves us in a dilemma when applying the theory to Nostromo. The peasantry in Costaguana fight alone against the classes in the grand alliance, but they themselves are not properly a class. The revolution in Sulaco, therefore, is not properly a class struggle even according to Marx's own definition of it. The best that could be achieved by a peasant "class" would be a temporarily victorious rebellion, and historically a complete victory would be impossible. Yet in Nostromo, there is nothing impossible about such a victory. Where, then, does this leave Marx's insistence in the opening line of The Communist Manifesto that "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle"?

The role played by the aristocracy in the Sulaco revolution also tends to deny the validity of the marxist model of a bourgeois-democratic revolution. As we have seen, in such an analysis, the Blanco's should have been fighting against Gould and not with him. But in fact their power is very much diminished and the Monterist press quite rightly calls them "Gothic remnants" (p.158). Prior to the secession of Sulaco, there is no stable political structure in Costaguana, and the bulk of the country remains in this state. There has been no time when a native aristocracy (by which I mean to speak of Spanish colonials) has ruled supreme in the country. This again presents problems for the marxist approach, for Marx argues (at least most of the time) that the political

superstructure reflects the economic, or material, substructure. It follows that an unstable political structure necessarily implies a fractional class structure, or even an instability within the classes themselves; a state of affairs which fits ill the marxist conception of historical change. The essential aspect of the country is that it cannot have an historiography (in the marxist or any other sense), but merely a history of instability from which it is unable to escape by its own devices.

Conrad's vigorous use of the time-shift seems to me to be relevant to his concern with history both as a social force and as an analytical tool. Gareth Jenkins writes of Part One of the novel:

The basic movement here is circular. But in finishing where we began (from the fictional point of view) we move from the future forwards into the past. Thus the fictional structure is at loggerheads with the time-sequence of events referred to in Part One. The reason for this apparently unnecessary reversal of normal order is not hard to discover. By looking at the dinner from the viewpoint of the overthrow of the Ribiera regime, Conrad quite clearly intends us to reflect upon the folly of pinning one's hopes to a "progressive and patriotic undertaking"....We have in Part One a miniature version of what the book as a whole, in a series of circular movements, brings out: that the future does not move away from the past but is doomed to repeat it. (13)

This sort of explanation of the complex structuring of the novel appears to be quite common, despite the rather obvious fact that conditions in Sulaco at the end of the book are so unlike those at the beginning as to deny any possibility of historical recurrence. I have my doubts too about the suggestion made by some other commentators that the time-shifts are a purely technical device used to produce a concatenation or simultaneity of visual effect. To what end?

For what purpose?

I would suggest that Conrad had at least two aims in mind. First, to use a complex time-structure as a means of reflecting the society depicted; to deliberately befuddle the reader in such a way as to ensure that he can sense the confusion, chaos, and instability of the society of which he is reading. In historical terms, Ribiera's regime is relatively short-lived, but Conrad wishes to go into some considerable detail about it. He therefore uses the fiction to give the impression of a rapid transition from one regime to another.

Conrad's second purpose, I think, was to give the sense of the novel being a slice of raw history. A strictly chronological plotting would have produced, as always, the effect of a framed portrait; the society only existing within the two covers of the novel. By inserting in various places a glimpse into the past, and then again a glimpse into the future, Conrad hints at an independent existence for his ✓ Costaguana, freed from the limitations imposed upon it by the novel itself.

But there is, I suspect, a more important aspect still to Conrad's use of the time-shift in Nostromo, and that is the way in which it implies a particular view of the historical process itself. Wilding writes that

Irving Howe's argument that Nostromo verifies Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution depends on a reconstruction of the 'actual' chronology, a chronology deliberately disrupted to destroy any impression that one revolution leads forward to another. In the novel as we read it, memories from one regime are inter-mixed with the present and future others, so that we hardly know of which we are reading. The suggestion is that it doesn't matter. (14)

It seems to me that it really does matter. What the time-shifts do is to give one the sense of history as it is made,

and impress upon us the fact that history is a messy and disordered business. As John Orr has noted, the sort of history we see in Nostromo is one which makes room for myth (15). A chronology of events (even if accurate or complete) does not reveal the reality of the matter, for it inevitably seems to impose order on an otherwise disordered phenomenon. Conrad shows us precisely this by allowing the ridiculous Captain Mitchell to give his visitors an account of the events we have witnessed in the rest of the novel. It is the sort of account we might read in a history book. But there are facts which Mitchell does not know; which nobody knows. Nobody, for example, knows the truth about Nostromo. Mitchell is constantly speaking about "history" being made under his nose, but at the very moment he is assuring his guest of the "incorruptibility" of Nostromo, the Capataz is busy thieving. The implication, surely, is that what is commonly regarded as "history" is little more than a convenient fiction? The study of history can teach us nothing for it cannot convey the life sensation of any previous epoch, or reveal its crucial reality. The novel, therefore, seems to refute all theories of society which are based on 'historical' analysis. Nostromo appears to support a marxist theory of revolution, but in fact must refute it.

III

If it is difficult to analyse the society we see in Nostromo in terms of theories of class, it is much easier to approach it from the premise that the political life of Costaguana is profoundly influenced by half-understood ideas and copy-cat institutions imported from Europe. This approach

has the advantage not only of explaining what it is that the triple alliance (Gould, Avellanos and Nostromo) is fighting against, but also of demonstrating Conrad's views on the operation of ideas in history.

The making of history in Costaguana up to the Sulaco war of independence is the work not of civil or economic forces, but of the vicissitudes of military fortune. Costaguana is born with a soldier, Bolivar, and this sets a tradition which is exploited fully, first by Guzman Bento and then by Montero. Indeed, soldiers in Nostromo are legion: Sotillo; Don Pepe; Barrios; Hernandez; Viola. It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find that Conrad is interested in the army as an agent of government. Evidently, he does not find it a fit instrument to run a state, as his description of Guzman Bento's dictatorship eloquently illustrates. The grotesque excesses of that man and the tendency of dictators to suffer delusions of grandeur and paranoia are well worked in, as is the attendant corruption of the military machines they preside over. They are also inherently unstable regimes since the rigid hierarchy of the army tends to produce powerful contenders from within its own ranks. Witness, for example, Sotillo's defection, first to the Monterists and then to his own cause.

All of this is very convincing material, demonstrating the lawlessness and barbarity of military men intent on the spoils of conquest. More than this, however, it points to Conrad's deeply-felt antagonism to what I think is appropriately termed "bonapartism". It is appropriate not only because Napoleon Bonaparte must be accounted the arch military adventurer of modern times, but also because Conrad is eager to point us in this direction. We are told, for example,

that Pedrito Montero thought of himself as a latter-day South American Duc de Morny (p.387). In his interview with Gould he

declared suddenly that the highest expression of democracy was Caesarism: the imperial rule based upon the direct popular vote. Caesarism was conservative. It was strong...It was progressive. It secured the prosperity of a country. Pedrito Montero was carried away. Look at what the Second Empire had done for France... The Second Empire fell, but that was because its chief was devoid of that military genius which had raised General Montero to the pinnacle of fame and glory. (p.405)

We can hardly fail to notice the contemptuous comedy here, and it is clear that Pedrito (sometimes Pedro) is a figure of fun.

A long course of reading historical works, light and gossipy in tone, carried out in garrets of Parisian hotels, sprawling on an untidy bed, to the neglect of his duties, menial or otherwise, had affected the manners of Pedro Montero. (p.404)

Importantly, however, there is a serious purpose behind the comedy. As the narrator says, "No Costaguanero had ever learned to question the eccentricities of a military force.

They were part of the natural order of things" (p.393).

Conrad clearly intends to show us that a bonapartist military tradition of government is a very dangerous thing. This is what he has to say about Napoleon:

The degradation of the ideas of freedom and justice at the root of the French revolution is made manifest in the person of its heir; a personality without law or faith, whom it has been the fashion to present as an eagle, but who was, in truth, more like a sort of vulture preying upon the body of Europe which did, indeed, for some dozen years, very much resemble a corpse. The subtle and manifold influence for evil of the Napoleonic episode as a school of violence, as a sower of national hatreds, as the direct provocator of obscurantism and reaction, of political tyranny and injustice, cannot well be exaggerated. (16)

References to bonapartism in Nostromo are not confined to the Second Empire. Conrad evidently wishes us to concentrate more on an idea than on one specific historical epoch. In order to reinforce the links between the Montero brothers and the Bonaparte family as a whole, he inserts into the text occasional obscure references to the First Empire. General Barrios, for example, remarks that his task is to "put Montero in a cage" (p.164), echoing the almost identical promise Marshal Ney is reputed to have made to King Louis when Napoleon first returned to France from Elba for his famous "Hundred Days" (17). And I hardly need remark on the similarities between the early careers of Napoleon and Montero, both rising to power from obscure army posts. I do not wish to make too much of this. Although there are the similarities I have mentioned, Montero clearly belongs in Costaguana and he is not in any way a parody of Napoleon. Nostromo, as I indicated earlier, is not a tale of Europe. My intention in drawing the parallels I have, is simply to identify the symbol Conrad uses in the novel to denote a system of ideas derived from a belief in the national benefits arising out of a military dictatorship endorsed by a single popular vote. (Pedrito tells Senor Fuentes, "We shall organize a popular vote, by yes or no, confiding the destinies of our beloved country to the wisdom and valiance of my heroic brother, the invincible general. A plebiscite." (p.391)). I should, however, make it clear that "bonapartism" was not a word Conrad himself tended to use. He instead used the word "Caesarism", which, of course, bears very similar connotations.

In a letter to Spiridion Kliszewski of December 1885, Conrad writes:

England was the only barrier to the pressure of infernal doctrines born in continental back-slums. Now there is nothing! The destiny of this nation and of all nations is to be accomplished in darkness amidst much weeping and gnashing of teeth, to pass through robbery, equality, anarchy and misery under the iron rule of a military despotism! Such is the lesson of commonsense logic.

Socialism must inevitably end in Caesarism... I have ceased to hope a long time ago. We must drift! (18)

This is a very young Conrad. His language and his ideas are naïve and intemperate. And I am sure that he does not know what he means by the word "socialism". His letter was a response to the news of a Liberal victory in the General Election of November 1885 (19). He found what he took to be socialism in "Disestablishment, Land Reform, Universal Brotherhood", which were "but like milestones on the road to ruin". It does not much matter whether this is an accurate vision of socialism. Nor is it important that Conrad clearly misunderstood the nature of British Liberalism at that time (20). What is important is that if we recognize the identity of meaning between the terms "caesarism" and "bonapartism", we find that Conrad conflates historical epochs separated by almost a century. The French revolution produced caesarism, and British "socialism" in the 1880s was likely to produce very much the same thing. Evidently Conrad does not know what he is talking about, but I think that there are two important assumptions behind his thinking. One is that the ideas or ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity must inevitably lead first to chaos and then to military despotism. The other is that such "infernal doctrines" can be transmitted through time, acquiring new names but not new substance. In other words, socialism is at bottom not much different from republicanism. Both, for Conrad, are the voices of

rebellion and chaos.

I have quoted elsewhere the passage in Lord Jim wherein Marlow is made to exclaim:

"Hang ideas! They are tramps, vagabonds, knocking at the backdoor of your mind, each taking a little of your substance, each carrying away some crumb of that belief in a few simple notions you must cling to if you want to live decently and would like to die easy!" (21)

However, Conrad's attitude to the dangers of ideas does not confine itself to a concern for their moral effects on the individual, but it is further extended to their effect upon society or the body politic. The notion that most, if not all, ideas are inevitably subversive makes its appearance in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', in which the combination of James Wait and Donkin almost succeeds in driving the crew to mutiny. The notion surfaces again in Nostromo, not only through the figure of Viola, but also in the use of political ideas by other characters in the novel, in the form of a rhetoric designed to hide the realities of motives and intentions. Pedrito Montero, for example, makes use of a rhetoric which is not his own. He has a colourful and historical imagination, but we can hardly believe that he is seriously interested in what "Caesarism" can do for the people of Costaguana. The truth is that he wants to be a great statesman in the European style.

...his eyes, very glistening as if freshly painted on each side of his hooked nose, had a round, hopeless, birdlike stare when opened fully. Now, however, he narrowed them agreeably, throwing his square chin up and speaking with closed teeth slightly through the nose, with what he imagined to be the manner of a grand seigneur. (p.405)

Again we can note the comedy of the passage, but the important point is that he is merely playing at it. We must be careful not to mistake the rhetoric which is borrowed from Europe with

the realities of South American politics as depicted in the novel. In Costaguana, such ideals as liberty and fraternity are the harbingers of chaos, for the traditions within which they make sense are lacking in the post-colonial world of South America. Local dignitaries, for example, ape the British commitment to Parliamentarianism, except that there is no substance to the institution itself. And Guzman Bento adopts the title "citizen saviour", imitating the rhetoric of the French revolution. In other words those characters in Nostromo who profess to hold by ideals or ideas bred in a European context do so for self-interested reasons. As Decoud says,

What is a conviction? A particular view of our personal advantage either practical or emotional. No one is a patriot for nothing. (p.189)

This bears a remarkable similarity to the marxist contention that material and social conditions, or our perception of them, precede and dominate our consciousness. Marx writes:

Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life. (22)

In other circumstances, however, it is clear that Conrad sometimes saw history as the product of ideas, both moral and immoral. In his essay, "Autocracy and War", he writes of the French revolution:

The parentage of that great social and political upheaval was intellectual, the idea was elevated; but it is the bitter fate of any idea to lose its royal form and power, to lose its "virtue" the moment it descends from its solitary throne to work its will among the people. (23)

Gareth Jenkins comments that the passage "implies that history is created by forces outside itself, by 'ideas' that degenerate

when they come into contact with brute historical matter" (24). He adds that Conrad, therefore, views the world a-historically. But such an assumption will not do, unless we are prepared to argue that Conrad could not possibly have written Nostromo. The society we see in the novel is the result of historical forces painstakingly described by Conrad. Ideas and convictions are shaped by history as we can see in the cases of Gamacho and Fuentes. When the Monterist forces seem to be victorious, the two deputies instantly become convinced Monterists. Certainly, Conrad's history as we see it in Nostromo is governed by chance much more than, say, marxist history; but Conrad hardly underestimates its importance.

The passage does, however, contrast strikingly with Conrad's rather Hegelian view of history by which he sees nations progressing in the wake of moral improvement and in the direction of moral objectives. This view is also implicit in "Autocracy and War". Whilst Europe has before it the possibility of progress, although difficult of attainment, Conrad claims that Russia is incapable of advancement.

In whatever form of upheaval Autocratic Russia is to find her end, it can never be a revolution fruitful of moral consequences to mankind. It cannot be anything else but a rising of slaves.

And -

A brand of hopeless mental and moral inferiority is set upon Russian achievements... (25)

To see progress in terms of moral advancement and to make a point of denying Russia the possibility of this, must obviously imply that history elsewhere can and must be made by the force of moral ideas.

All of this is rather confusing. Sometimes Conrad seems to imply that ideas degenerate when they come into

contact with the material world. Sometimes he seems to think that moral progress, through the force of moral ideas, is at least possible. On other occasions still, he implies that history is not made by ideas at all, but that ideas are made by history (or something very like it). Faced with all this confusion there are many, I am sure, who would say that Conrad was a novelist and not a philosopher, and that he was not, therefore, in any way obliged to be consistent. Which is true enough, but it seems to me that Conrad's very inconsistency tells us something about the way in which many of the characters in his fiction are conceived.

When he is at his most archly sceptical, Conrad, like Decoud, is convinced that most "convictions" are sponsored by self-interest of one sort or another. Montero, for example, favours "caesarism" over other forms of government because he stands to derive the greatest benefit from it in terms of personal prestige and power. It is a perfectly valid portrait of a power-hungry individual; one would have to be extremely naive to suppose that such persons did not exist. On the other hand, the charge that ideals and principles are mere camouflage for personal advantage is usually reserved for characters Conrad does not like, and in particular the demagogue, the radical and the revolutionary. In Nostromo, for instance, Fuentes and Gamacho defect to the Monterist cause for their own ends. And in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', Donkin's radicalism is a simple product of his dissatisfaction with his personal lot.

Conrad's scepticism of some is matched by a naïve faith in others. If, for example, we re-examine Decoud's statement that a conviction is only a "particular view of our personal

advantage either practical or emotional", and then test its validity against the various characters in the novel, we find that it is not applicable to all of them. The text offers us few grounds for supposing that the charge be true of Avellanos or Viola. However, by contrasting these two characters, we can discover the essential nature of Conrad's attitude to ideas. We may recall the passage I quoted earlier in which Conrad claims that "it is the bitter fate of any idea to lose its royal form and power, to lose its 'virtue' the moment it descends from its solitary throne to work its will amongst the people". The images contained in this statement, "royal form and power", "solitary throne", these are strongly contrasted with "the people". The difference, of course, is between the top and the bottom ends respectively of the social order. In Nostromo this is precisely the difference between Avellanos and Viola. It is hardly without significance that Avellanos is noble, worthy and blameless, whereas Viola, though equally noble in intent, leaves behind him a legacy of moral regression. On this issue, therefore, Nostromo demonstrates two points. First, that it is not the idea as such which is Conrad's bête noire, but particular sorts of idea. Second, that this distinction corresponds to the conviction that only the beliefs and ideas of the upper classes in society can have any moral validity. In other words, history can be made by ideas, but the ideas of "the people" lead to chaos, slaughter and rapacity, as in Conrad's image of the French Revolution, and the ideas of the aristocracy lead to a golden age of moral fortitude and beauty.

IV

It must have been with some resentment that Conrad watched the declining power and influence of the aristocracy in Europe. The part which he desired it to play on the stage of world history was, in his own lifetime, a thing of diminishing possibility. With, we may imagine, a certain amount of regret, Conrad in Nostromo chronicles the decline of the nobility and the culture which, in his eyes, only it could attain.

The first suggestion that the aristocratic world is in decay comes in Europe, in the "palace" in which Emilia Gould has been brought up. It had belonged to Emilia's aunt who married a middle-aged and impoverished Italian marquis. The marquis, now dead, had "known how to give up his life to the independence and unity of his country", and had "known how to be as enthusiastic in his generosity as the youngest of those who fell for that very cause of which old Giorgio Viola was a drifting relic" (p.60). We are told that the palace is "ancient and ruinous". Conrad's description of the hall seems particularly important.

a room magnificent and naked, with here and there a long strip of damask, black with damp and age, hanging down on a bare panel of the wall. It was furnished with exactly one gilt armchair, with a broken back, and an octagon columnar stand bearing a heavy marble vase ornamented with sculptured masks and garlands of flowers, and cracked from top to bottom. (p.61)

Here, magnificently conjured, is the tomb of Italian aristocracy, destroyed by the movement of which Viola has been a part. The emphasis is much as we might expect from Conrad; it is the ruination of beauty by the baseness of the base. Like Henry James in Princess Cassamasima, Conrad tries to demonstrate the clash between culture and the "people".

Flatly, but with imaginable distaste, he describes how the empty halls "sheltered under their painted ceilings the harvests, the fowls, and even the cattle, together with the whole family of the tenant farmer" (p.60).

Conrad's concern at the danger to culture threatened by the collapse of the aristocracy is, in Nostromo, repeatedly expressed in terms of crumbling architecture. In Costaguana, where aristocracy must face its painful end within the time-span of the novel, the Casa Avellanos is "grey, marked with decay" and it displays "chipped pilasters, broken cornices" which mark "the whole degradation of dignity" (p.181). More telling than this is the treatment meted out to the Intendencia in Sulaco by the mob. The tall mirrors have been "starred by stones"; the hangings have been torn down; there is a "belt of heavy gilt picture-frames running round the room, out of which the remnants of torn and slashed canvases fluttered like dingy rags"; "not a single chair, table, sofa, Étagère or console had been left in the state rooms of the Intendencia" (pp.391-2). Such, for Conrad, is what 'liberty' for the "people" amounts to; the destruction of a culture which can only flourish in an inegalitarian and hierarchical society. Culture is the raison d'être of the hereditary nobility, but to the people it is like a red rag to a bull.

If in Nostromo we see the decline of the aristocracy through time-scarred architecture, both metaphorically and in actuality, we see it also through Avellanos whose decline and death is symbolic of a broader malaise. History overtakes this historian, whose life's work, the Fifty Years of Misrule, is left unfinished and scattered through the streets like so much worthless litter. And yet Avellanos is the only

character in the novel who wields true moral authority. His superiority over even Viola is quite clear. A man who can write of Guzman Bento, his persecutor, that "his worst fault, perhaps, was not his ferocity but his ignorance" (p.142), has a distinct nobility far above and beyond that of a man who is "full of scorn for the populace" and believes that the nation's leaders treat the people "as if they were dogs born to fight and hunt for them" (p.418). In this way, Conrad seems to continue the search for moral authority he began in 'Heart of Darkness'. If man cannot derive moral principles or direction from something beyond himself, he is forced to look within his own very human world for guidance. Much of Conrad's moral and political thinking, therefore, hinges on a single question: what sort of man is fit to lead? Evidently, the man of genius has been dismissed in 'Heart of Darkness' primarily because there is nothing to him but ability, whilst in Nostromo the failure of any character to offer genuine moral leadership is a prominent theme.

The one quality that almost all of the leaders in Nostromo have in common is that their actions, however well disguised, are prompted more by their own interests, perceived or otherwise, than they are by a genuine concern for the public good. This applies not only to those obvious examples, Montero and Sotillo, but also to the illustrious Nostromo. Whether or not Nostromo should be considered a leader is, I suppose, an issue. In the author's note of 1917, Conrad writes:

I needed ... a man of the People as free as possible from his class-conventions and all settled modes of thinking ... Had he been an Anglo-Saxon he would have tried to get into local politics. But Nostromo does not aspire to be a leader in a personal game. He does not want to raise himself above the mass. He is content to feel himself a power - within the People. (26)

I do not doubt it is accidental, but Conrad is misleading us here. The obvious fact is that Nostromo is not and cannot be "of the People", in the sense that the people are anonymous and he is not. Given the way in which Nostromo deals principally with political élites, this in itself implies that Fidanza is a figure of considerable importance. On the pedestrian level at least, Nostromo is certainly a 'boss', both as Foreman of the Wharf and as captain of his own ship. Conrad may have wanted us to see him as a man "of" the People, but he is such a singular fellow and the People such a vague point of reference, that it is difficult to imagine in what sense he may belong to anything.

As Capataz de Cargadores, Nostromo in fact makes a good leader. The narrator describes the Cargadores as an "unruly brotherhood of all sorts of scum" (p.95). "Scum"? - well, we can certainly see where Conrad's sympathies don't lie. But the important point is that Nostromo transforms these "scum" into a heroic fighting force we are fully intended to admire. He organizes and disciplines them, controlling their actions to such an extent that he is able to promise Decoud that they will support the Europeans in the event of a riot, however political. This, however, is a part of the portrait of Nostromo which we receive before the fatal combination of Viola and vanity destroys his ability to lead with nobility. Towards the end of the novel his leadership of the Cargadores which had promoted order, is replaced by his leadership of the so-called "secret societies" which promote disorder. Clearly, Conrad does not think we should admire him in his latter role.

Few of the other leaders are much better. Gould, for

example, is concerned only with the safety of his mine and he is not at all interested in the moral well-being of his country. The parliamentarians make even less convincing leaders. The abject Don Juste Lopez, ridiculous with half his beard missing, is prepared to concede everything to Montero in order to preserve the form of the parliamentary institutions copied from England. In capitulating to Montero in such a manner they make ridiculous the great principle which is supposed to inspire them.

At this point I want to say something about Conrad and democracy, since it is clear from Nostromo that he thought Costaguanerans (at least) too ignorant to rule themselves and too gullible to prevent themselves being mis-ruled by others. I think, for instance, of the illuminating moment when Pedrito's llaneros confront an equestrian statue of King Charles IV. "What is that saint in the big hat?", they ask each other (p.385). It is no wonder that Gamacho and Fuentes are able to put themselves at the head of a wave of local hysteria.

It seems to me, however, that the Edwardian age was a time of crisis for liberal democracy in England, both in practice and in principle. The so-called "Dangerfield thesis" pointed to the new problems of the twentieth century as a way of explaining the sudden demise of the Liberal party. The problems Dangerfield had in mind were such things as Home Rule, women's suffrage and the militancy of the relatively new unskilled labour unions (27). It might be equally true to say that these problems presented a challenge to the parliamentary system itself, as people on both the right and the left became dissatisfied with it as an instrument of government. Besides those on the left who distrusted parliament because they thought it an instrument of class rule, were

others, like Shaw and Wells, who were dissatisfied with it because it was slow and inefficient at bringing about urgently needed reforms. Shaw, for example, was a socialist but he nevertheless compared representative government to a hot-air balloon; which goes up every six years with pretty much the same people in it as had gone up the previous time. Anti-democratic views were by no means the sole preserve of the right. Given this, it is not surprising that Conrad's scepticism of the capacity of "the People" to control their own destiny would appear opportune even if it had its roots in a pessimism provoked by quite different circumstances, in a different country, and in what was essentially a different age. But apparent similarities between Conrad and his contemporaries are for the most part spurious. Unlike Shaw and Wells, who had become dissillusioned with democracy, Conrad had all along maintained that very little could be expected of it. And although they all looked to élites for political salvation, the two Fabians thought our leaders must get better, whilst Conrad thought they could get a lot worse. In short, Wells and Shaw were by and large men of their time, addressing themselves to current difficulties, whereas Conrad was a man out of his time, a product of his peculiar background who looked at the modern world with one eye on the past.

Conrad accepts without question the inescapable need for leaders, in the same way that he has no doubts about the requirement for ships at sea to have captains and obedient crews. His emphasis for the common seaman on the virtues of fidelity and devotion to duty, is quite unmistakeable. When we read The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' we are intended to accept the moral superiority of Singleton over Donkin, as well

as the practical superiority of Allistoun over both. There is no denying the thoroughly élitist strain in Conrad's fiction and Nostromo is no exception. To judge by the evident intention of the novel, it is clear that Conrad thought that government should be the province of men like Avellanos; men who are scrupulously just, honest and honourable; men who hold that one has a duty first and foremost to one's country; who want for their nation "an honourable place in the comity of civilized nations" (p.140). One cannot avoid suspecting that Avellanos represents the aristocratic class in general; after all, his "name, his connections, his former position, his experience, commanded the respect of his class" (pp.140-1).

The failure of Avellanos in everything except the maintenance of his own moral integrity, makes more bleak still the political future of a Costaguana in the grip of subversive class-hatred and stark materialism. Don José Avellanos dies of grief and humiliation at the collapse of everything he holds precious, for the Monterist coup sweeps away the last grains of decency and honour. It is a tragic end. Of course, Avellanos is a sentimental creation, but Conrad is not trying to make a political point. It is simply that he has a naïve faith in the virtues of an hereditary aristocracy. It is also true that he has little faith in its survival. Importantly, it is the sceptic, Decoud, rather than Avellanos who speaks most often for Conrad. It seems not without significance that in a novel very much about fathers and sons, Avellanos should whisper to Decoud, "In God's name then, Martin, my son!" (p.236). Scepticism plays heir to an aristocracy in retreat. Is this, perhaps, a symbolic representation of the relationship Conrad perceived between himself and his own father?

V

On the very first page of Nostromo the influence of technology upon the Sulaco province is hinted at. With its calms, "Sulaco had found an inviolable sanctuary from the temptations of a trading world in the solemn hush of the deep Golfo Placido". But with the development of the "modern ship built on clipper lines", and later with the coming of the steamships of the O.S.N., a process begins which is to change the nature of the province in a manner so drastic that no one beforehand could have expected it. It seems perfectly clear that it is only the arrival of modern technology in Sulaco which makes possible its liberation from chaos and bonapartism.

This brings us to the issue of the exploitation of the mineral resources of Costaguana by foreign investors and the assumption by most commentators that Conrad is highly critical of such 'imperialist' ventures. Certainly he does not like the American financier, Holroyd, whose brazen over-confidence is nicely reflective of the growing strength of American financial power in the twentieth century. Holroyd tells Gould:

"Time itself has got to wait on the greatest country in the whole of God's Universe. We shall be giving the word for everything: industry, trade, law, journalism, art, politics, and religion, from Cape Horn clear over to Smith's Sound... We shall run the world's business whether the world likes it or not. The world can't help it - and neither can we, I guess." (p.77)

The narrator comments that "By this he meant to express his faith in destiny in words suitable to his intelligence, which was unskilled in the presentation of general ideas. His intelligence was nourished on facts..." (p.77). We can be quite certain that the narrator and Conrad are identical persons

here, for Conrad's antipathy to all things American is a well documented fact. Richard Gurle, for example, reports that Conrad had "maintained that the whole country was commercialized to a point where nothing else really mattered" (28).

Evidently Conrad does not like United States involvement in the affairs of South America precisely because it involves the export of squalid commercialism.

As for the question of imperialism, I do not think Conrad is very interested in this as an issue in Nostromo, at least not in the way he is interested in it in 'Heart of Darkness'. If the novel is supposed to expose foreign commercial interests for what they are, as some critics have suggested, it does not do so very convincingly. There are two very good reasons for being unconvinced. First, because Avellanos, the real tragic hero of the novel, is made to actively support the foreign investment programme in Costaguana. And second, because the opponents of foreign 'exploitation' in the country are the Monterists, who lead a nationalist backlash against foreigners in Costaguana but see perfectly clearly the advantages that foreign investment can bring. By having a barbarian like Montero oppose foreign influence in Costaguana, Conrad confers respectability upon it. We need also take note of Robert Penn Warren's comment that the society at the end of the novel is preferable to that at the beginning.

I have already conceded that Nostromo is not an unreserved champion of material interests. As Doctor Monygham says,

"There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle." (p.511)

Monygham, however, is giving here only a part of the story, for it is plain that the problems with which the new republic is faced are not solely the blemished fruits of materialism. Another cause of strife has its roots in something much older and much more deep-seated: religion (29).

Our first impression may be that the conflict between Corbelán and Holroyd is a ridiculous Punch and Judy show, an absurd pantomime of relative insignificance against the background of material forces. But a closer look at the situation reveals that it is a much more sinister affair between massive institutional forces. Holroyd, of course, is not merely a capitalist, but also a protestant of the puritan strain. Mrs. Gould reports that "Mr. Holroyd's sense of religion ... was shocked and disgusted at the tawdriness of the dressed-up saints in the cathedral - the worship, he called it, of wood and tinsel" (p.71). He indulges in the lavish patronage of the "purer forms of christianity" (p.80), which in practical terms means the endowment of churches (p.71), and the "Protestant invasion of Sulaco organized by the Holroyd Missionary Fund" (p.509). Thus the protestant faction can call to its aid the powerful material interests represented by Holroyd himself. Arrayed against this foreign alliance is the full power of the catholic church which is represented in Sulaco by the Cardinal-Archbishop Corbelán, promoted to this exalted position by the authorities in Rome as a direct result of Holroyd's activities (p.509). Neither is Corbelán bereft of support, for he is in league with Antonia Avellanós and exercises massive influence over the Minister of War, Hernández. Together with the refugees from Sta. Marta, and in alliance with Nostromo and the secret societies, Corbelán conspires for

the invasion of Costaguana (p.511). Clearly, the terms of reference within which Conrad deals with these two religious camps precludes any consideration of the spiritual guidance they may offer. His treatment of the conflict between them is evidently intended to remind us that we are dealing with institutions which, like the material interests Monygham condemns, are also without rectitude or moral principle. Corbelán, for example, is not concerned with the truly spiritual or moral welfare of his flock, but with the task of winning souls for the church. And his way of going about it involves him very considerably in political activity; in the service of an institution his watchword must be expediency and not principle. And as always the "people" find themselves in the middle of a tug-of-war between rival institutions and leaders inspired by "visions of a high destiny" (p.420).

It is, however, implicit in Nostromo that these religious conflicts are due to subside, for as Dr. Monygham says, the chief conspirator is the last of the Corbeláns. On the other side, the protestant-capitalist tradition is on the way out too, because Holroyd's spiritual heir is Charles Gould who is not in the least interested in religious considerations, and does not wish material interests to serve any cause but their own. Thus, the old religious dogmas are replaced by new secular dogmas, and Sulaco is left to face a bloody and bitter battle yet to come between Gould and the photographer.

Clearly Conrad would prefer the Goulds of this world to their opponents in this struggle, as is made perfectly clear by the physical characteristics attributed to the marxist photographer. At the same time, however, Gould hardly approaches the ideal, for he is a cold and uncaring man, very

much like the material interests he serves. Conrad sets the tone when he describes some of Holroyd's employees as "insignificant pieces of minor machinery in that eleven-storey-high workshop of great affairs" (p.84). If Montero is an animal, then Gould is a machine.

Nostromo, then, is a deeply pessimistic novel, and particularly so in relation to the political and social issues it explores. It seems to champion materialism as a means of attaining political and social improvement, whilst demonstrating the failures of leaders and institutions to provide genuine moral direction. Materialism itself is, in the long run, divisive. Both capitalism and communism as seen in Nostromo emphasise the central importance of material wealth. And yet if materialism cannot be moral, as the novel implies, then a more equitable distribution of material wealth cannot be a moral solution to it. Communism not only inspires a violent and thoroughly unacceptable class-hatred, but also fails to disengage itself from the dangerous obsession with material interests. This is the sort of thinking a man may well indulge in if he is not himself in desperate need of the basic material necessities. For all his high-sounding insistence on the need for moral principle in the political life of his Costaguana, Conrad's cynicism about human nature comes very close to mere callousness. Throwing up one's hands in despair does not feed people.

What Nostromo does do, however, is to present us with distinct historical options to given political problems, thus avoiding the crude analysis of the political novel which treats its subject in the absence of its historical context. I do not pretend that Conrad is entirely successful in this if only

because he is unwittingly guilty of fixing the terms of the debate in advance. I think, for example, of the way he sentimentalizes Avellanosa, or refuses to understand the marxist photographer. But I do think, however, that Nostromo is an honest attempt to allow us our choice. And as a portrait of "an epoch in the history of South America" (30), the novel is splendidly successful in its scope and originality. Even in its most political aspects it has a deeply depressing ring of authenticity, such that we can instantly recognize the cruel realities of South American political conflict. Indeed, it would seem churlish to disagree with George Orwell when he writes that Conrad possessed "a sort of grown-upness and political understanding which would have been almost impossible to a native English writer at the time" (31).

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' (Dent), pp.24-25.
2. Ibid., p.25.
3. Ibid., pp. 10-11.
4. To equate Viola with socialism is perhaps to confuse the issue, but it is difficult to see how else he may be characterized. The label "socialist" is, I think, justified by Viola's egalitarian and libertarian spirit and by the consequent mis-use of his ideas by those who come after.
5. 8th. February, 1899. Quoted in Baines, op.cit., p.201.
6. Howe, op.cit., p.101.
7. The phrase "native ruling class" is Howe's. Surely Trotsky did not say that a native ruling class would be too weak to make a bourgeois-democratic revolution? If they were a ruling class, why should they want a revolution?
8. Avrom Fleishman, Conrad's Politics (1967) Baltimore, p.179.

9. Ibid., pp.163-4.
10. Karl Marx, Poverty of Philosophy (1847), Paris. Quoted in Bottomore and Rubel (ed.), Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy (1973), p.195.
11. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto (1967), p.91.
12. Karl Marx, 18th Brumaire (1852), Quoted in Bottomore and Rubel op. cit., p.196.
13. Jenkins, op. cit., p.149.
14. Wilding, op. cit., p.441
15. See John Orr, Tragic Realism and Modern Society (1977).
16. "Autocracy and War", in Notes on Life and Letters (Dent) p.86.
17. John Fisher, Eighteen Fifteen (1963) London, p.92.
18. Quoted in Baines, op. cit., p.81.
19. Ibid.
20. Conrad clearly thought of the Liberal radicals as socialists, and in lamenting a "socialist" victory he may have had Chamberlain in mind.
 "We have to account for and to grapple with the mass of misery and destitution in our midst....I shall be told tomorrow that this is Socialism. Of course, it is Socialism. The greater part of municipal work is Socialism, and every kindly act of legislation by which the community has sought to discharge its responsibilities and its obligations to the poor is Socialism, but it is none the worse for that"
 (Speech at Warrington, 8th September, 1885. From H.W. Lucy (ed.), Speeches of Rt. Hon. Joseph Chamberlain, 1885.) Despite the support he received from other radicals like W.E. Forster and Charles Dilke, Chamberlain was hardly in a position in 1885 to challenge the supreme authority in the party of Gladstone's old-style liberalism, which remained committed to the principles of laissez-faire and self-improvement. Chamberlain, in fact, was shortly to split with Gladstone completely over Home Rule and to join the Liberal Unionists in 1886.
21. Lord Jim (Dent), p.43.
22. The Communist Manifesto, op.cit., p.102.
23. "Autocracy and War", op. cit., p.86.
24. Jenkins, op. cit., p.142.
25. "Autocracy and War", op. cit., p.102.
26. Author's Note (1917) to Nostromo (Dent), p.XXIV.

27. George Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England (1936).
28. Curle, op. cit., p.209.
29. I must admit some indebtedness to Stanley Tick, "The Gods of Nostromo", Modern Fiction Studies, X, pp. 15-26.
30. Curle recalls that Conrad had written in his copy of Nostromo that it had been his intention to "render the spirit of an epoch in the history of South America" (p.95).
31. Quoted in Hay, op. cit., p.7.

Anarchism and Society in The Secret Agent

I

There has been some debate in recent years concerning Conrad's precise purpose in writing The Secret Agent. Some commentators have accepted that the novel was intended to be a straightforward attack on the principles and activities of revolutionaries, indeed, as at first sight it may indeed appear to be. Irving Howe, for example, sees the novel as a product of the old school entrenched against the new. For him, Conrad's was "a politics of defence: a desire to remain untouched by the fearful effects of industrialism, to be let alone by history, to retain privileges and values that are slipping away" (1). On the whole, however, critics have generally been less interested in the anarchist figures in The Secret Agent than they have been in the rest of the novel. This, I suspect, is explained by what is more or less a convergence of critical opinion in support of Howe's central argument that it "does not give an accurate picture of nineteenth-century anarchism" (2), and, more importantly, that it fails to treat anarchism seriously. Feeling that Conrad's anarchists contradict our sense of what anarchists of the period were "really" like, such critics have taken to examining Conrad's evocation of the world in which his anarchists operate in order to explain wherein the novel's merit lies. E.B. Gose Jr., for example, claims that the novel is "less about the shortcomings of a group of conscious anarchists than about the failure of a whole society" (3). Gose evidently feels that The Secret Agent is a good novel, but he is embarrassed by the anarchists in it. Hence, it is not really about anarchists at all, but about something else. However, although The Secret Agent is indisputably a fine novel, we shall find it

difficult to explain its worth if we insist on waving a good half of it away in a futile attempt to be fair to nineteenth-century anarchism.

To a certain extent, Howe has a point. The novel does indeed contain some very crude anti-anarchist propaganda. Take, for example, Conrad's treatment of Comrade Ossipon. He is clearly a scoundrel and a parasite, but he is also an anarchist and a member of the more or less mysterious "red-committee". The implication of this simple juxtaposition is that anarchists are scoundrels and parasites. However, one of the most obvious of Comrade Ossipon's characteristics is his apparent lack of interest in anarchism. It is therefore difficult to see how anarchism is to be rationally connected with such parasitic behaviour. Another example of the way in which Conrad can be very unsophisticated in his disparagement of anarchism, is his frequent use of grotesque physical characteristics to evoke poverty or delinquency of character. The Professor is described thus:

...the dingy little man in spectacles coolly took a drink of beer and stood the glass mug back on the table. His flat, large ears departed widely from the sides of his skull, which looked frail enough for Ossipon to crush between thumb and forefinger; the dome of the forehead seemed to rest on the rim of the spectacles; the flat cheeks, of a greasy, unhealthy complexion, were merely smudged by the miserable poverty of a thin dark whisker. (p.62)

And Karl Yundt:

...Karl Yundt giggled grimly, with a faint black grimace of a toothless mouth. The terrorist, as he called himself, was old and bald, with a narrow, snow-white wisp of a goatee hanging limply from his chin. An extraordinary expression of underhand malevolence survived in his extinguished eyes. When he rose painfully the thrusting forward of a skinny groping hand deformed by gouty swellings suggested the effort of a moribund murderer summoning all his remaining strength for a last stab. (p.42)

Just as Conrad in Nostromo actively protects Mrs. Gould from the reader, so here he offers his anarchists up for scorn, allowing them little dignity and firmly manipulating the terms of debate. I have little doubt that Conrad's political sentiments were typical of those of his class, and that in certain details his anarchists are products of a crude theatrical conception, probably derived from sensational newspaper accounts of anarchist subterfuge.

Considered in such terms, Howe's dismissal of the anarchists in The Secret Agent is at least understandable. But there are two reasons why we should take a closer look at the figures themselves. The first is that it is a well-documented fact that Conrad has made an effort to get his anarchists right, at least in terms of their personal circumstances or temperaments. Norman Sherry, for example, is able to demonstrate that in certain details Karl Yundt is based upon a combination of two real anarchists, Michael Bakunin and Johann Most (4). I might perhaps illustrate this point by juxtaposing two passages, one taken from George Woodcock's Anarchism regarding Most, and the other taken from The Secret Agent describing Yundt. Woodcock reports that Most wrote a pamphlet on the making and use of bombs and poisons and that this was supplemented by articles in his journal, Die Freiheit, "in praise of dynamite and on easy ways to manufacture nitroglycerine" (shades of the Professor?). Woodcock continues with the following:

All these matters Most discussed with the sinister enthusiasm of a malevolent and utterly irresponsible child. He never used and probably never intended to use such methods himself; he recommended them to others instead... (5)

Yundt is described in very similar terms.

The all but moribund veteran of dynamite wars had been a great actor in his time - actor on platforms, in secret assemblies, in private interviews. The famous terrorist had never in his life raised personally as much as his little finger against the social edifice. He was no man of action; ... he took the part of an insolent and venomous evoker of sinister impulses... (p.48)

Whilst it may not be entirely just to single out the more unsavoury of the nineteenth-century anarchists as models for his own, we must allow it to Conrad that he did not need to look far for ammunition to use against them.

Another reason for taking a detailed look at the anarchists in The Secret Agent is that Conrad takes two of them sufficiently seriously to allow them to speak for themselves. And what they say is not only interesting and convincing, it is also evidence of his willingness to try to understand two specific types of anarchist faith. Of these, the first is egoistic and the second is altruistic.

II

Of the four anarchists in the novel, Irving Howe mentions only the Professor, about whom he writes that, "it is difficult to regard this grimy lunatic as anything other than a cartoon" (6). However, a detailed examination of this character is warranted; first, because Howe's comment is a bare assertion at best, and second, because the Professor occupies a central position in the novel.

One of the first things that we notice about the Professor is that his physical appearance and his character are curiously at odds with one another, so that the "lamentable inferiority of the whole physique was made ludicrous by the supremely self-confident bearing of the individual" (p.62). The Professor's bearing is the outward expression of his complete

egoism, which has developed as a result of "unfair treatment" and "revolting injustice". And the evidently unimpressed narrator adds that

His struggles, his privations, his hard work to raise himself in the social scale, had filled him with such an exalted conviction of his merits that it was extremely difficult for the world to treat him with justice... (p.75)

The Professor is "an individualist by temperament" who nurses a frenzied puritanism of ambition; to see it thwarted "opened his eyes to the true nature of the world, whose morality was artificial, corrupt and blasphemous" (p.81). This is the process by which the Professor has become an revolutionary, a process which has made rejection of the social structure a condition of continuing self-esteem. More importantly, it bears comparison with the career of the German anarchist, Max Stirner.

Stirner, whose real name was Johann Caspar Schmidt, was born in Bayreuth, then an obscure town, in 1806. After studying at the local gymnasium, he embarked on an unremarkable and undistinguished university career. He eventually passed, narrowly, the examination for a certificate to teach in Prussian gymnasia, which he took at the University of Berlin. Schmidt then worked as an unpaid training teacher for a year and a half, at the end of which he was refused a salaried position. In 1839, he was finally taken on as a teacher in Madame Gropius's Berlin academy for young ladies, where he taught for five years. In 1843 he published The Ego and his own. George Woodcock has noted the apparent contradiction between the book and Schmidt's character:

Just as Schmidt assumed a new name to publish his book, so he appeared to create a new personality to write it, or at least to call up some violent, unfamiliar self that was

submerged in his daily existence. For in the unhappy, luckless, and ill-ordered career of the timid Schmidt there was nothing at all of the free-standing egoist of Max Stirner's passionate dream; the contrast between the man and his work seems to provide us with a classic example of the power of literature as a compensatory daydream. (7)

Stirner conspicuously failed to achieve the prominence which he believed was consistent with his merits. Much the same may be said of the Professor. And like Stirner, the Professor develops theories which may broadly be termed "anarchist".

As the title of Stirner's one famous, or infamous, book suggests, the notion of the ego is at the core of his philosophy. For him, the ego is the self, the unique character or personality which is the individual consciousness. Since a man's perception of the external world is also an integral part of the self, it follows that the ego is the only thing of which he can have certain knowledge. Thus, Stirner argues, it is the responsibility of each to cultivate his own uniqueness and to reject false and abstract notions such as "man" or "humanity". A man must listen to his "own will", disregarding the absurd and irrelevant claims of a falsely gregarious society. For Stirner, the ego is the only law; there can be no rights, laws, or obligations that bind the individual, for all such merely subjugate and suffocate the free will of the ego. His chief enemy, therefore, is the state.

The State is not thinkable without lordship and servitude (subjection); for the State must will to be the lord of all that it embraces, and this will is called the "will of the state" ... The own will in Me is the State's destroyer; it is therefore branded by the State as "self-will". Own will and the State are powers in deadly hostility, between which no "eternal peace" is possible. (8)

Stirner's criticism of existing society is that it is based on the worship of collective man. Its systems of legislation and law enforcement impose intolerable restrictions upon the man who recognizes only his own will. This is precisely the Professor's doctrine. His egoism is immense: "There are very few people in the world whose character is as well established as mine", he tells Ossipon, and when the latter asks how he "managed it", he replies, "Force of personality" (pp. 67-68). The obstacle to the Professor fully realizing his own potential as an unfettered egoist is the whole notion of rights and duties, typified in the concept of legality.

"It is this country that is dangerous, with her idealistic conception of legality. The social spirit of this people is wrapped up in scrupulous prejudices, and that is fatal to our work." (p.73)

Stirner's doctrine involves the very same rejection of the rule of law.

I do not demand any right; therefore I need not recognize any either. What I can get by force I get by force, and what I do not get by force I have no right to, nor do I give myself airs ... Entitled or unentitled - that does not concern me, if I am only powerful, I am of myself empowered, and need no other empowering or entitling.

Right - is a bat in the belfry, put there by a spook. (9)

By denying that there is any right, and therefore also denying moral law, the Professor believes himself to have established the superiority of his own character over all those who still adhere to such notions. Ossipon suggests that there are "individuals of character" amongst the police, the law-enforcers, but the Professor, always absolutely consistent, is able to counter decisively.

"...I am not impressed by them. Therefore they are inferior. They cannot be otherwise. Their character is built upon conventional morality. It leans on the social order. Mine stands free from everything artificial. They are bound in all sorts of conventions. They depend on life, which, in this connection, is a historical fact surrounded by all sorts of restraints and considerations, a complex, organized fact open to attack at every point; whereas I depend on death, which knows no restraint and cannot be attacked. My superiority is evident." (p.68)

The Professor's superiority is also evident where the other anarchists are concerned. When he claims that he depends on death, he not only means that he is prepared to destroy himself rather than submit to arrest, but also that his aim is the total destruction of existing society.

"You revolutionists...are the slaves of the social convention, which is afraid of you; slaves of it as much as the very police that stands up in the defence of that convention. Clearly you are, since you want to revolutionize it. It governs your thought, of course, and your action, too, and thus neither your thought nor your action can ever be conclusive

"...The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality - counter moves in the same game; forms of idleness at bottom identical. He plays his little game - so do you propagandists. But I don't play..." (p.69)

Stirner also attacks revolutionaries in The Ego and His Own, notably Marx and the avowed anarchist Proudhon, on more or less the same grounds as the Professor attacks his fellow conspirators. According to Stirner's doctrine, to assert any principle that is absolute or to assert a collective abstraction, is to imply some notion of right. Rights, however, do not exist. There are only conventions, or in other words, imagined rights. What is required of the true revolutionary is the complete destruction of society in all its forms.

Can State and people still be reformed and bettered now? As little as the nobility, the clergy, the church, etc.: they can be abrogated, annihilated, done away with, not reformed. Can I change a piece of nonsense into sense by reforming it, or must I drop it outright? (10)

Stirner claims that a more desirable future society would be a union of egoists, which could only be attained by the annihilation of existing society. He characterizes the new world of the egoists with words such as "force", "power" and "might". He claims that such a world would not be a perpetual nightmare of slaughter, pillage and rape, for an equilibrium of opposition would develop. (One wonders how these qualities of might and power would manifest themselves?). What really seems to have offended Johann Caspar Schmidt was that others should have power over him, and it is therefore no surprise to find that in the new world of the egoists, the master-servant relationship will no longer exist. The true egoist recognizes that to rule over others is to destroy his own independence.

He who, to hold his own, must count on the absence of will in others is a thing made by these others, as the master is a thing made by the servant. If submissiveness ceased, it would be all over with lordship. (II)

It is precisely on the question of what sort of world should supersede the existing one that the Professor and Stirner diverge. The Professor's vision of the future that lies beyond the destruction of the present is truly one in which "might" and "force" rule supreme. He tells Michaelis that he dreams of "a world like shambles, where the weak would be taken in hand for utter extermination." And he explains his meaning to Comrade Ossipon thus:

"The source of all evil! They are our sinister masters - the weak, the flabby, the silly, the cowardly, the faint of heart, and the slavish

of mind. They have power. They are the multitude. Theirs is the kingdom of the earth. Exterminate! Exterminate! That is the only way of progress. It is! Follow me, Ossipon. First the great multitude of the weak must go, then the only relatively strong. You see? First the blind, then the deaf and the dumb, then the halt and the lame - and so on. Every taint, every vice, every prejudice, every convention must meet its doom" (p.303)

C.B. Cox claims that the Professor's words are "prophetic of fascism and Hitler's Germany" (12), but it is clear that the Professor is too much an individualist to make a good fascist. He cares nothing for the race. But his words might have been uttered by a social-darwinist of the worst kind, and they certainly reek of the pseudo-biology of racial hygiene as it can be found in the writings of, for example, Alfred Rosenberg. The figure who immediately comes to mind in this connection is Friedrich Nietzsche. There is much in his philosophy which has been described as fascistic, whilst, on the other hand, there can hardly be any need to point out the resemblance between Nietzsche's superman and Stirner's egoist. Indeed, Nietzsche himself regarded Stirner as one of the unrecognized seminal minds of the nineteenth century (13).

The Professor's passion for indiscriminate destruction is a logical extension of his egoistic philosophy, and to understand why this is so we need to look more closely at his opposition to "legality". Not only is the notion of 'rights' the great evil of society as the egoist sees it, it is also the base on which that society rests. With perfect insight, the Professor realizes that the only way to destroy such a society is to undermine the idea of rights itself, to defeat the assumption that there can be a moral law, to "destroy public faith in legality" (p.81)..

"To break up the superstition and worship of legality should be our aim. Nothing would please me more than to see Inspector Heat and his likes take to shooting us down in broad daylight with the approval of the public. Half our battle would be won then; the disintegration of the old morality would have set in in its very temple. That is what you ought to aim at. But you revolutionists will never understand that. You plan the future, you lose yourselves in reveries of economical systems derived from what is; whereas what's wanted is a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life. That sort of future will take care of itself if you will only make room for it." (p.73)

Now Stirner makes precisely the same claim:

...the more the devoted mind for legality is lost, so much the more will the State, this system of morality, this moral life itself, be diminished in force and quality... "Respect for the law!" By this cement the total of the State is held together. (14)

But whereas Stirner made no attempt to live by the dark principles of his anarchist theories, Conrad has his egoistic anarchist attempt to live in harmony with his. With the meagre resources at his disposal, the Professor does his utmost to bring about a collapse in conventional morality. But the conventions upon which private morality and public duty are based are so extensive, as I hope to show in due course, that the only way he can live according to his own doctrine without contradiction is to become completely isolated and totally self-reliant. The more complete this isolation becomes, the more his inadequacy prods his vanity towards total self-delusion. His hatred of the social order and of conventional morality cannot under such circumstances be confined to inanimate objects or abstract notions. It increasingly turns against the people in whom these things are manifest; and that means everybody.

He was in a long, straight street, peopled by a mere fraction of an immense multitude; but all round him, on and on, even to the limits of the horizon hidden by the enormous pile of bricks, he felt the mass of mankind mighty in its numbers. They swarmed numerous like locusts, industrious like ants, thoughtless like a natural force, pushing on blind and orderly and absorbed, impervious to sentiment, to logic, to terror, too, perhaps.

That was the form of doubt he feared most. Impervious to fear! Often while walking abroad, when he happened also to come out of himself, he had such moments of dreadful and sane mistrust of mankind. What if nothing could move them? (pp. 81-82)

The Professor, who early in life finds himself nursing a wounded vanity, finally becomes an avowed enemy of the "odious multitude of mankind". On the final page we see him passing through the streets, "unsuspected and deadly, like a pest in the street full of men". Inspector Heat rightly calls him a "lunatic" (p.97). For Conrad, there is something distinctly insane about egoistic anarchism.

But before I go further, I would like to say something about Howe's dismissive conclusion that the Professor is nothing more than a "cartoon". The similarities between the doctrines and the backgrounds of the Professor and Max Stirner are quite considerable. Stirner was a fanatical egoist; the Professor is best described in the same words. Stirner revelled in violence; so does the Professor. Their criticisms of the existing social structure are fundamentally the same. It does not seem unreasonable to suppose that Conrad modelled the Professor either directly or indirectly upon Stirner, or at least on Stirner's ideas. The real German anarchist and the fictional American terrorist (15) even share two physical attributes. Both were bespectacled and both were highbrowed. I have not come across any evidence to suggest that Conrad knew what Stirner looked like,

so, of course, this may be a coincidence. However, it seems certain that Conrad knew something of Stirner's The Ego and His Own, which was read widely in the 1890s and during the Edwardian era, both within and outside anarchist circles (16). It is clear, therefore, that there is a degree of seriousness in Conrad's creation of the Professor which seems to deny Howe's charge that the character is utterly divorced from the realities of nineteenth-century anarchism.

Yet even if Conrad did not base the Professor on Max Stirner, it does not much affect my argument. The point is that the character is a convincing egoist, committed to the destruction of legality, or in other words to the destruction of the social conventions which hold society together. One gets the impression that Conrad's feelings towards this character were ambiguous to say the least. In a previous chapter I attempted to show that Conrad was highly sceptical of the reality of moral law, and 'Heart of Darkness' certainly seems to imply that human morality is founded on social convention and little else. There is, therefore, an important part of the Professor's doctrine that Conrad must, perhaps reluctantly, agree with: moral codes are not divine imperatives, but social expedients. Therein lies the ambivalence. Conrad fears the egoistic anarchist because he speaks the truth and is therefore dangerous. At the same time he has no illusions about the immobility of the public conscience, which, as I shall argue presently, is founded on resignation or blindness. The one weakness in Conrad's presentation of this character, therefore, is that he finds himself stretched indelicately between two mutually exclusive viewpoints: either the Professor is to be laughed at, or he

is to be feared. Conrad cannot decide which.

III

If Conrad is uncompromisingly hostile in his treatment of the Professor, his approach to the obese Michaelis exhibits a far greater tolerance, if not a certain degree of affection. This is not to say that Conrad allows him much dignity. After all, Michaelis is pathetically fat ("his round and obese body seemed to float low between the chairs" (p.51)), and Conrad mockingly gives him the nickname, "the ticket-of-leave apostle". He cuts a rather comic figure. Yet at the same time his political ideas are convincingly genuine. We notice, of course, that Michaelis does not make a very terrifying sort of anarchist; the Professor considers him weak and feeble as well as stupid. Such meekness on Michaelis's part is perhaps easier explained if we recognize that he is, first, a genuine humanitarian, and second, a positivistic determinist.

Michaelis, of course, is not really an anarchist but a socialist. This may seem a rather devious distinction on my part, but I think that it is a useful one and I shall pursue it for that reason alone. There are of course many differing creeds that have been at one time or another designated "socialist", but the one to which I will devote my attention is that which originated with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, otherwise called marxist-socialism, or, popularly, and perhaps erroneously, communism. Michaelis is speaking to the assembled anarchists at Verloc's shop:

"History is made by men, but they do not make it in their heads. The ideas that are born in their consciousness play an insignificant part in the march of events. History is dominated and determined by the tool and the production - by the

force of economic conditions. Capitalism has made socialism, and the laws made by the capitalism for the protection of property are responsible for anarchism" (p.41)

I am aware, of course, that there are many who would argue that this represents a crude sort of marxism at best, and that Marx never intended us to suppose that history could not be made to respond to men's ideas. There is, however, a fundamental ambivalence in marxist doctrine on precisely this point. Marx sought to effect an equilibrium between consciousness and being, between man's will to shape his destiny on the one hand, and the restraints of the historic conditions of production and class-conflict on the other. His anxiety to stress the scientific character of his doctrine led him to over-emphasize the latter, particularly in Capital, and thus exposed him to Bernstein's charge that as a materialist he was "a Calvinist without God" (17). It is, therefore, hardly surprising that many who called themselves, and indeed thought of themselves as, marxists never recognized the voluntarist element in Marx's teaching. For this reason it would seem unfair not to give Conrad credit for his concisely drawn portrait of the fatalistic marxist. This is not to say that Conrad knew the difference between one kind of marxist and another. He very probably thought them all determinists. But that doesn't matter. What is important is that Michaelis's beliefs are credible down to the last detail, and even if those details are only used to lampoon marxist thinking it does not alter the fact that they are well-devised instruments.

That Conrad was well-informed about marxist doctrine may well be inferred from the following two passages. The narrator, speaking, as it were, on behalf of Michaelis, says

He was so far from pessimism that he saw already the end of all private property coming along logically, unavoidably, by the mere development of its inherent viciousness. The possessors of property had not only to face the awakened proletariat, but they had also to fight amongst themselves. Yes. Struggle, warfare, was the condition of private ownership. (p.43)

And also:

He saw Capitalism doomed in its cradle, born with the poison of the principle of competition in its system. The great capitalists devouring the little capitalists, concentrating the power and the tools of production in great masses, perfecting industrial processes, and in the madness of self-aggrandizement only preparing, organizing, enriching, making ready the lawful inheritance of the suffering proletariat. (p.49)

In order to illustrate just how good a summary of the determinist position this is, I feel I must find space for a somewhat lengthy quotation from the "father of German marxism", Karl Kautsky.

We consider the breakdown of existing society as inevitable, since we know that economic development creates with a natural necessity conditions which force the exploited to strive against private property; that it increases the number and power of the exploited while it reduces the number and power of the exploiters, whose interest is to maintain the existing order; that it leads, finally, to unbearable conditions for the mass of the population, which leaves it only a choice between passive degeneration and the active overthrow of the existing system of ownership... Capitalist society has failed; its dissolution is only a question of time; irresistible economic development leads with natural necessity to the bankruptcy of the capitalist mode of production. The erection of a new form of society in place of the existing one is no longer something merely desirable; it has become something inevitable. (18)

Howe thinks Conrad's revolutionaries contradict our sense of what nineteenth-century anarchism was really like. Perhaps this is so; but Michaelis is clearly not conceived in an idle or ignorant manner.

Although the narrator's description of Michaelis's ideas is obviously rather tongue-in-cheek, the socialist's determinism is important to Conrad's intention to treat him as a harmless fellow. If the great new age of peace and prosperity is inevitable then, as the exasperated Ossipon says, "it's no use doing anything - no use whatever" (p.49). Michaelis may be prepared to work at producing revolutionary propaganda, thinking it a "delicate work of high conscience" (p.50), but he is not interested in violent revolution. In this he contrasts sharply with the Professor who is scathing about the value of propaganda. "The condemned social order", he says, "has not been built up on paper and ink, and I don't fancy that a combination of paper and ink will ever put an end to it..." (p.71).

Conrad clearly intends us to see Michaelis's brand of socialism as a sort of humanist religion. The narrator tells us that

He was like those saintly men whose personality is lost in the contemplation of their faith. His ideas were not in the nature of convictions. They were inaccessible to reasoning. They formed in all their contradictions and obscurities an invincible and humanitarian creed... (p.107)

This, of course, is not really good enough. In what sense are Michaelis's ideas "not in the nature of convictions"? What are the "contradictions" and "obscurities" which prove them "inaccessible to reasoning"? Such comments, and Conrad's repetitive and ironic use of words such as "saintly" and "faith" to describe Michaelis, are examples of the way in which the narrative description is regularly obtrusive. Conrad writes elsewhere that the "real Socialism of to-day is a religion" (19), and in The Secret Agent he is determined that

we should agree with him. Whilst he does, to an extent, let us see for ourselves, there can be little argument that the almost endless suggestions of religiosity in words and phrases such as "revealed in visions", "confessions of faith", and "act of grace" tend to obscure other aspects of the portrait.

We do, however, need to remember two things about Conrad's creation of Michaelis. The first is that he is deliberately conceived as a balance against both the violent destructiveness and the egotism of the Professor. Michaelis clearly has a highly subdued sense of self, which allows him to think about the sufferings of others; his revolutionism is creative where the Professor seeks only to destroy. And my second point is that Michaelis is in fact persecuted and oppressed by the society he lives in. That Conrad is able to show society capable of gross injustice in locking away harmless critics of the social order indicates that although he may have been a reactionary, he was not an hysterical one.

IV

Irving Howe writes that "Stevie's history is acutely worked in, but he figures merely as a prepared victim" (20), and it is easy to see how he can think that. As a victim, Stevie is indeed well-prepared. His half-wittedness, his innocence and his simple and heart-felt compassion are all well established through a series of finely detailed scenes. But what Conrad establishes best of all is the pathos of this sad creature:

He could say nothing; for the tenderness to all pain and misery, the desire to make the horse happy and the cabman happy, had reached the point of a bizarre longing to take them to bed with him. (p.167)

A sentimental touch, perhaps, but not crudely so. And unless we be very hard and unimaginative souls, we cannot help but take young Stevie to our hearts; which is exactly as it should be, for the character is fully intended to engage our sympathy. But although I agree that Stevie is indeed a finely prepared victim, it is absurd to think that that is all he is. He occupies a central role in the novel not merely as a victim, but also as an acute observer of the way in which others fall victim to an uncaring and indifferent world.

Let us look briefly, then, at this world which engages young Stevie's attention and sympathy. Now I admit that there does not seem very much to see in The Secret Agent in respect of a "society" as such, but we do have, at least, a man and a woman and a horse. Let us consider the woman first.

...Mrs. Neale was scrubbing the floor. At Stevie's appearance she groaned lamentably, having observed that he could be induced easily to bestow for the benefit of her infant children the shilling his sister Winnie presented him with from time to time. On all fours amongst the puddles, wet and begrimed, like a sort of amphibious and domestic animal living in ash-bins and dirty water, she uttered the usual exordium: "It's all very well for you, kept doing nothing like a gentleman." And she followed it with the everlasting plaint of the poor, pathetically mendacious, miserably authenticated by the horrible breath of cheap rum and soap-suds. She scrubbed hard, snuffling all the time, and talking volubly. And she was sincere. And on each side of her thin red nose her bleared, misty eyes swam in tears, because she felt really the want of some sort of stimulant in the morning. (p.184).

To complete the scene, Stevie becomes angry on discovering that he has no shilling in his pocket with which to relieve Mrs. Neale's children. Winnie Verloc then arrives to "stop that nonsense", being "well aware that directly Mrs. Neale received her money she went round the corner to drink ardent spirits in a mean and musty public-house - the unavoidable

station on the via dolorosa of her life" (p.185). Now in an important respect, such a scene confirms that Conrad was little insulated from the prejudices of his class. Evidently he wants to think that the poor exaggerate their poverty, for their "plaint" is "mendacious". And then, of course, they most go "directly" to the ale-house or the gin-shop with what little they have. But Conrad is not preaching. Nor is he mocking the afflicted. One comment in particular stands out: that the public-house is the "unavoidable station on the via dolorosa" of Mrs. Neale's pitiful existence. The via dolorosa, the way to Calvary, is the way, surely, of the persecuted and the heavily-laden? The public-house is an unavoidable station: the gin-shop is the product of poverty which it in turn aggravates. Importantly, Conrad nowhere suggests, as many did, that the love of gin is the root of all poverty.

I shall come presently to a consideration of those two other victims in the twilight world of The Secret Agent, the cabman and his horse. But before I do I should like to quote a passage from William Booth's In Darkest England and the Way Out.

Mr. Carlyle long ago remarked that the four-footed worker has already got all that this two-handed one is clamouring for: 'There are not many horses in England, able and willing to work, which have not due food and lodging and go about sleek coated, satisfied in heart.' You say it is impossible; but, said Carlyle, 'The human brain, looking at these sleek English horses, refused to believe in such impossibility for English men.' Nevertheless, forty years have passed since Carlyle said that, and we seem to be no nearer the attainment of the four-footed standard for the two-handed worker.....

What, then, is the standard towards which we may venture to aim with some prospect of realisation in our time? It is a very humble one, but if realised it would solve the

worst problems of modern Society.

It is the standard of the London Cab Horse.(21)

Booth's book was published in 1890, some seventeen years before The Secret Agent, and although Conrad may have known little of it, it is at the very least a fascinating coincidence that the London Cab Horse should be a common interest. The two authors, however, seem to have somewhat different estimates of the lives of those singular creatures, for Conrad's horse is very far from possessing "due food" and a "sleek coat".

Stevie was staring at the horse, whose hind quarters appeared unduly elevated by the effect of emancipation (sic). The little stiff tail seemed to have been fitted in for a heartless joke; and at the other end the thin, flat neck, like a plank covered with old horse-hide, drooped to the ground under the weight of an enormous bony head. The ears hung at different angles, negligently; and the macabre figure of the mute dweller on the earth steamed straight up from ribs and backbone in the muggy stillness of the air. (pp.165-6)

Was this the "standard of the London Cab Horse" to which Booth looked forward as a condition to be attained for all men? I think not, but the important point is that the miserable poverty of Conrad's Cab Horse is powerfully evocative of the appalling inhumanity of an economic system which makes such sacrifices necessary.

The cabman suffers from much the same difficulties as does Mrs. Neale: with children at home to support and "a pub down the street" (p.168). The cabman, dulled by the "benumbing years of sedentary exposure to the weather" (p.159), moans to Stevie:

"You may well look! Till three and four o'clock in the morning. Cold and 'ungry. Looking for fares. Drunks." (p.166)

And he concludes that it is "'Ard on 'osses, but dam' sight 'arder on poor chaps like me" (p.167). It is a fine scene

altogether. Initially, the cabman only works "up to two o'clock in the morning". The man is not eloquent enough to give adequate expression to the fullness of his sorrows so he compensates by raising the level of the sort of suffering he can express. By including such a detail, Conrad not only avoids seeming slushily sentimental, he is also able to show that the man's inability to communicate his distress exacerbates his vulnerability. The cabman is deserving of Stevie's sympathy, as he is of ours.

In his presentation of the misery of these creatures, we may detect an honest dislike on Conrad's part for the workings of the capitalist metropolis, notably in the way in which the material rewards of labour are proportioned according to fitness and ability rather than need. The driver of the hackney carriage, being maimed and thereby disadvantaged from the outset, is given the poorest of horses at the yard, which he must whip all the more severely if he is to earn a living. The horse must suffer so that the cabman and his family shall not suffer more than they already do. And each cabman must compete with all the other cabmen for his daily bread. In short they must feed off one another, or rather one must go hungry so that another may feed decently.

All of this Stevie sees clearly:

... he went along without pride, shamblingly, and muttering half words, and even words that would have been whole if they had not been made up of halves that did not belong to each other. It was as though he had been trying to fit all the words he could remember to his sentiments in order to get some sort of corresponding idea. And, as a matter of fact, he got it at last. He hung back to utter it at once.

"Bad world for poor people."

Directly he had expressed that thought he became aware that it was familiar to him already in all its consequences. This circumstance strengthened

his conviction immensely, but also augmented his indignation. Somebody, he felt, ought to be punished for it - punished with great severity. Being no sceptic, but a moral creature, he was in a manner at the mercy of his righteous passions.
(pp. 171-2)

Injustice and poverty are things which prey upon Stevie's mind, which is sympathetic and wide-open to the pains and sorrows of the world. His powerful imagination enables him to see more clearly the abhorrent nature of the economic and social system than even the conscious anarchists who are pledged to destroy it. But that very same faculty is the cause of his shambling idiocy, for the mere description of suffering is sufficient to hurl him into a helpless funk. It is illustrative to compare him with Karl Yundt. He is as well aware as Stevie that there is brutal injustice in the world, and he states precisely what the cabman scene seems to confirm.

"Do you know how I would call the nature of the present economic conditions? I would call it cannibalistic. That's what it is! They are nourishing their greed on the quivering flesh and the warm blood of the people - nothing else." (P.51)

Yundt can see the truth, but his very capacity to enunciate it confirms his lack of imaginative sympathy. By contrast Stevie is utterly felled by the horrific vision Yundt has created.

Stevie swallowed the terrifying statement with an audible gulp, and at once, as though it had been swift poison, sank limply in a sitting posture on the steps of the kitchen door. (p.51)

The crippling effect of a sympathetic imagination is a theme which Conrad first takes up in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and it revolves in that novel around the approaching death of the negro, James Wait. The crew respond sympathetically

to his condition and this, combined with circumstance and their own doubts and fears, brings them almost to the point of mutiny. Singleton, however, does not get sentimental about death. He wants Wait to get on with dying and shut up. His almost sentimentalized severity contrasts sharply with the emotional spasms of the crew. As Bruce Johnson points out, the "denial or restraint of sympathy... paradoxically sustains civilized order" (22). Singleton remains a reliable and loyal member of the crew because he has no imagination and therefore no compassion; although I do not think Conrad would have liked us to think of him in this way.

Conrad's doubts about the practical wisdom of human compassion, or rather about its desirability, anticipates Lawrence's desire to see that men are hard and bright and not slushy and sentimental. It was in this sense that Lawrence was a "primitivist". He rejected, or thought he rejected, those social values which were based on love, charity, charitableness. He thought altruism false because essentially selfish, and he called it "love-will" (23). But, ofcourse, Lawrence was only drawing upon a long tradition of scepticism about the reality and value of the so-called "christian virtues". In Thus Spake Zarathustra, for example, Nietzsche is boldly contemptuous of those who claim to love their neighbour, or who believe in moderation, or those who preach submissiveness (24). And in Blake the hope that "Love seeketh not itself to please" meets with the riposte of experience, "Love seeketh only Self to please". In a sense, Conrad seems to appeal to this same rebellious tradition. But what he is saying is not strictly the same as those who deny the honesty of what claims to be compassion or love.

In The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', Conrad is much less concerned about sympathy being somehow fraudulent, than he is about it having a crippling effect upon the sympathiser. As the title of the novel suggests, compassion is taken to be fundamentally narcissistic; in looking at Wait, the crew look into themselves. What they see there inevitably makes them profoundly miserable. Singleton, however, who is unself-conscious, is at least free from that curse.

But Stevie is not inured ~~aga~~ against the ravages of compassion. Through the portals of eyes and ears the world flows in on him unabated. Every pain is his pain, every sorrow is his sorrow. Even when Karl Yundt speaks only metaphorically of the people being branded by the law, Stevie is aghast.

Stevie knew very well that hot iron applied to one's skin hurt very much. His scared eyes blazed with indignation: it would hurt terribly. (p.49)

Stevie may not be self-conscious, and he is certainly no egoist, but it is nevertheless clear that he lives in an egocentric world. Its troubles, both animal and human, crush in upon his unguarded mind, stirring it into a seething whirl of rage, indignation, anger and fear. That is why he is a half-wit.

One of the most startling claims to have been made for Stevie is that he is "the one true anarchist" in the novel. Such is the claim of C.B. Cox, who argues that Stevie

takes refuge in destructive acts, for only the annihilation of society can rid the world of its cruelties. The bomb plan enables him, or so he thinks, to put his ideals into practice. (25)

But Cox's argument, it seems to me, is badly flawed. Stevie is "blown to fragments in a state of innocence and in the conviction of being engaged in a humanitarian enterprise" (p.226). Cox seems to forget that Stevie is a half-wit,

that he is an innocent and that he is manipulated by Verloc. It is one of the key ironies in the novel that Verloc's manipulation of Stevie is only made possible by Winnie's actions in inculcating in her brother an unshakeable conviction that her husband is a "good man". But if we forget that Stevie is essentially a passive victim and begin to think of him as an active conspirator, then we undermine such ironies, and with them the whole essence of Winnie's maternal passion and the hostile fate that destroys her.

But there is a more important point. What Cox has done, is to impose a definition of anarchism upon the novel, rather than find one in it. It is perfectly true that Stevie is peculiarly susceptible to Verloc's prompting because of his natural propensity for angry and destructive demonstrations whenever his sense of justice is offended. In one recounted incident, two office boys work upon his feelings with "tales of injustice and oppression" until he reaches such a state that he begins letting off fireworks.

He touched off in quick succession a set of fierce rockets, angry catherine wheels, loudly exploding squibs.... (p.9)

The implication is that Stevie is prompted to senseless destruction, or at least violent demonstration, by an impotent rage in turn fostered by a thwarted compassion. And that, thinks Cox, is anarchism. But is it? Surely to believe in such a definition is to surrender oneself to the crude popular conception of anarchism or anarchy as a condition of chaos? Can we really be sure that Conrad's vision was equally unsophisticated? Given his masterly portrayal of the Professor, this seems hardly credible.

Stevie's true importance in The Secret Agent lies more

obviously in his strange complicity with the Professor in rejecting the status quo, and in his opposition to his sister, who accepts it. Despite their differences, Stevie and the Professor are complementary. It is absolutely crucial to Stevie's half-wittedness and to his capacity for destruction that he cannot be reconciled to the imperfections of the world in which he lives. Although, ofcourse, the Professor is concerned for himself and not for others, he too is committed to changing the world. "The Professor had genius", comments the narrator, "but lacked the great social virtue of resignation" (p.75). (There is a disturbing irony in Conrad's claim that resignation is a "great social virtue", since although he is obviously tongue-in-cheek in describing it thus, it is nevertheless clear that he thinks of resignation as a vital ingredient of social stability.)

In The Secret Agent, as in 'Heart of Darkness', certain key words have a special value. The word "resignation", for example, is part of a set of complementary or opposing words designed to encapsulate the essential features of human social existence. It is a word which defines the distinction between genuine revolutionaries and the immovable masses who stand in their way. Karl Yundt's "passion" may be "worn-out" (p.43), but he can still understand this distinction, for he complains about "that resigned pessimism which rots the world" (p.42). This is aimed at his fellow revolutionist, Michaelis. And although Michaelis thinks it preposterous that Yundt should call him a pessimist, the narrator nevertheless has assured us that the ticket-of-leave socialist is indeed resigned.

It was said that for three seasons running a very wealthy old lady had sent him for a cure to Marienbad - where he was about to share the public curiosity once with a crowned head - but the police on that occasion ordered him to leave within twelve hours. His martyrdom was continued by forbidding him all access to the healing waters. But he was resigned now.
(pp.41 - 42)

We can, however, see for ourselves that Michaelis is resigned. In prison he has forged a thesis which allows him his resignation whilst not sacrificing his desire for a better future. As a determinist he has come to believe in a providential theory of history, as do others in the novel whose disposition inclines them towards resignation. But that is a matter I will come to later.

For the moment I want to focus on three other key words, all of which appear in the text with some regularity. They are "legality", "secrecy" and "blindness". I have already had occasion to mention the first of these in connection with the Professor, for it is precisely the notion of "legality" which he needs to destroy. It is a word which in the context of The Secret Agent comes to mean, or to imply, the seen, the public, the formal and the conventional. It is, for example, a word which is at the core of Chief Inspector Heat's affection for simple thieves who are of a kind he can understand (unlike anarchists). He can understand them because "the mind and the instincts of a burglar are of the same kind as the mind and the instincts of a police officer" (p.92). They both "recognize the same conventions", both accept the basic rules of conduct. For Heat, catching thieves "had the quality of seriousness belonging to every form of open sport where the best man wins under perfectly comprehensible rules" (p.97). Whereas there are "no rules for dealing with anarchists" (p.97).

Heat has understood the Professor perfectly, for the American terrorist acknowledges no rules and has made the rules themselves the target of his aggression.

The legality which the Professor seeks to destroy, however, is a powerful force, with a grasp wide enough to inform the perceptions of all but the most determinedly egoistic. Consider the following conversation which takes place between Ossipon and the Professor:

It was Ossipon who spoke first - still resentful.

"The fragments of only one man, you note. Ergo: blew himself up. That spoils your day off for you - don't it? Were you expecting that sort of move? I hadn't the slightest idea - not the ghost of a notion of anything of the sort being planned to come off here - in this country. Under the present circumstances it's nothing short of criminal."

The little man lifted his thin black eyebrows with dispassionate scorn.

"Criminal! What is that? What is crime? What can be the meaning of such an assertion?"

"How am I to express myself? One must use the current words" said Ossipon, impatiently. (p.71)

The Professor, of course, is quite right to reject the word "criminal". Crime is about breaking the rules. And Ossipon's use of the word presumes that the rules exist in the first instance. More important still is the fact that words themselves are subject to a highly complex set of rules and are allied to the social order. "One must use the current words", says Ossipon, but, as Jacques Berthoud points out, "By using language at all, one automatically submits to an infinitely subtle system of inherited codes". (26)

I think it can be fairly assumed that both as a sailor and a writer Conrad was concerned with the preservation of standards and that he was adamant about the imperative need for rules. In The Secret Agent, however, there are moments when Conrad seems to acknowledge that rules are easily

manipulated for private ends, and even that the rules themselves have little to do with justice or morality. I think, for example, of Inspector Heat's desire to implicate Michaelis in the bombing affair.

...it appeared to him just and proper that this affair should be shunted off its obscure and inconvenient track, leading goodness knows where, into a quiet (and lawful) siding called Michaelis. (p.123).

The philosophy of Chief Inspector Heat is of a simple kind. He finds it "expedient" to lay the blame on Michaelis and "the rules of the game did not protect ... Michaelis, who was an ex-convict" (p.122). Conrad labours the point:

It was perfectly legal to arrest that man on the barest suspicion. It was legal and expedient on the face of it. (p.121)

Heat is loyal to the conventions of his job, and to the conventions of his department, which he accepts without question in his simple, incurious way. To administer justice, or to serve the cause of justice in any way, is not his responsibility. His job is the execution and enforcement of the rules. This legal framework is so familiar to him that he thinks of thieves as "normal" - "as normal as the idea of property" (p.93).

And the centrality of property as a focal point of the law is made clear by Winnie Verloc who, in all unawareness of the truth of what she is saying, comments that the police are "there so that them as have nothing shouldn't take anything away from them who have" (p.173). Legality may be the foundation stone of all social organization, but it is inequable and seals the fate of the poor.

There is, however, another side to the social and human world of The Secret Agent, and it is represented in the word "secret". According to Avrom Fleishman, this word is used

more than fifty times in the novel (27), which gives us some measure of its significance as a motif. In the course of the novel it comes to signify the private, the unseen and the unconventional; in many ways the opposite of "legality". These two areas of thought and action are, however, complementary, and the implication is that the smooth running of the "legal" or public world is dependent on the secret one - the underworld. For an example of this we need look no further than the figure of Inspector Heat. His public success is dependent upon his private or secret actions and arrangements. His deal with Verloc, whereby he leaves Verloc alone in return for information on the movements, activities and whereabouts of the anarchists, is one such arrangement.

In order to fully understand how the public and the private worlds of The Secret Agent react with one another, and also to see the role played in this by "blindness", it is necessary to examine the married life of Winnie Verloc. She and Verloc share what is "in all essentials of domestic propriety and domestic comfort a respectable home" (p.195), and "respectability" is a quality of hers about which Conrad is eager to assure us. The extent to which she takes for granted the importance of public and domestic proprieties can be measured by the way in which she acknowledges them even after she has murdered her husband. Consider, for example, the scene in which she offers herself to Comrade Ossipon.

The voice of Mrs. Verloc rose subdued, pleading piteously: "Don't let them hang me, Tom! Take me out of the country. I'll work for you. I'll slave for you. I'll love you. I've no one in the world ... Who would look at me if you don't!" She ceased for a moment; then in the depths of the loneliness made round her by an insignificant thread of blood trickling off the handle of a knife, she found a dreadful inspiration to her - who had been the respectable girl of the Belgravian mansion, the

loyal, respectable wife of Mr. Verloc. "I won't ask you to marry me," she breathed out in shamefaced accents. (p.289)

Mrs. Verloc has that very day murdered her husband and yet she is still "shamefaced" about her offer. She is, we must agree, a woman of convention. And that conventionality is presented to us very much in the image evoked by this word "legality", for her marriage to Verloc is a "bargain" (p.261), or a "contract" (p.262). It proves, however, unfortunate for both of them that they have failed to communicate to one another the terms of the contract, which remain, in their way, secret. Verloc, for example, lives under the illusion that Winnie has married him for himself, whereas she has, in effect, prostituted herself in order to safeguard Stevie. Indeed, the narrator comments that Winnie was "capable of a bargain the mere suspicion of which would have been infinitely shocking to Mr. Verloc's idea of love" (p.259). Verloc does not know that Winnie has not married him for himself. Winnie feels that seven years' security for Stevie has been "loyally paid for on her part" (p.243), and she evidently thinks that Verloc has understood the bargain. It is a classic failure both of communication and of imagination.

On the other hand, as the narrator points out, "Mrs. Verloc's philosophical, almost disdainful incuriosity" was "the foundation of their accord in domestic life" (p.237). Both of them lean on the surface realities, and neither bothers to enquire into the secret lives of the other. Their relationship is composed of little more than the formalities and conventions of married life. In this instance, those conventions are that a good husband provides the material and financial stability for his wife, without bothering her with

the problems of that task; and that a wife runs the home and ensures that the Husband's domestic and physical needs are provided for.

... he beheld his wife re-enter the room and get into bed in a calm, businesslike manner which made him feel hopelessly alone in the world. Mrs. Verloc expressed her surprise at seeing him up yet.

"I don't feel very well," he muttered, passing his hands over his moist brow.

"Giddiness?"

"Yes. Not at all well."

Mrs. Verloc, with all the placidity of an experienced wife, expressed a confident opinion as to the cause, and suggested the usual remedies; but her husband, rooted in the middle of the room, shook his lowered head sadly.

"You'll catch cold standing there," she observed.
(p.57)

This is an acutely observed scene, in many ways anticipating Lawrence's extraordinary feel for the details of domestic life. And it shows Conrad's ability to deal with subjects well removed from those he is justly famous for. Verloc is nicely captured in his faltering and quickly dismissed attempt to communicate with his wife. His habitual secrecy has made him unsure of the reception a confidence might receive. For her part, Winnie's perfectly proper concern for her husband's physical health only reflects the incurious placidity of a woman who takes the central features of her married life for granted.

As the narrator assures us, Winnie Verloc is of the opinion that things do not "stand looking into very much" (p.241). She wastes "no portion of this transient life in seeking for fundamental information" (p.169).

She had an equable soul. She felt profoundly that things do not stand much looking into. She made her force and her wisdom of that instinct. (p.177)

This piece of "wisdom" is apparently endorsed by Conrad, who comments that, "Obviously it may be good for one not to know

too much" (p.169). But her failure to ask fundamental questions, and thus to discover the wickedness that is afoot, leads to Stevie's annihilation at the hands of her husband. It is she who forces the lad on him, so that there is some truth in Verloc's protest to her that

"...if you will have it that I killed the boy, then you've killed him as much as I." (p.258)

Another side of Winnie Verloc's life rests upon her capacity for resignation. Like Michaelis she is resigned to the horrors of the social order. When Stevie is at the height of his "excitement" and misery because of his encounter with the cabman and his horse, Winnie twice dismisses his compassionate grief, saying "Come along Stevie. You can't help that", and, "Nobody can help that" (p.172). But her blindness and resignation, which together constitute a dangerous naïvety, also make her vulnerable.

...it was not death that took Stevie from her. It was Mr. Verloc who took him away. She had seen him, without raising a hand, take the boy away. And she had let him go, like - like a fool - a blind fool. (pp.246-7)

If Stevie's case demonstrates that if one looks one cannot function, then Winnie's case demonstrates that if one does not look one runs the risk of walking over a precipice.

This twin defence mechanism of blindness and resignation, the very mechanism which saves others from the sort of funk which incapacitates Stevie, is not at all confined to Winnie Verloc. It is in fact widespread, and it is reflected in the fact that there is a great deal of obesity amongst the characters in the novel. Winnie herself, for example, has "ample shoulders" and she is "massive and shapeless" (p.179). Verloc, of course, is "burly in a fat-pig style" (p.13), and Michaelis "Round like a distended balloon" (p.50). Now some

critics have been quick to argue that there is little merit or sophistication in merely presenting anarchists as fat and lazy. Leavis, for example, although admitting that the Professor and Michaelis are "special cases", complains that Conrad explains anarchism "in terms of indolence" (28). But indolence, obesity and domestic repose are symbolic, or at least representative, of the capacity to turn a blind eye to suffering, or else of the capacity to resign oneself to it. Importantly these features are just as noticeable, if not more so, amongst members of the establishment. And this is especially so when we think that Verloc is not a revolutionary, but an agent provocateur, a secret agent fully at ease with the social order. Fatness and indolence are the marks not of revolutionaries but of those who accept the status quo or who have no difficulty in living with it. The man at the embassy, Vladimir, is quick to see this and he chides Verloc for getting fat:

"...What do you mean by getting out of condition like this? You haven't got even the physique of your profession." (p.21)

At the other end of the social scale, however, Sir Ethelred does very much have the physique of his profession.

Vast in bulk and stature, with a long white face, which, broadened at the base by a big double chin, appeared egg-shaped in the fringe of thin greyish whisker, the great personage seemed an expanding man. (p.136)

Sir Ethelred is hard at work introducing his Bill for the Nationalization of Fisheries. His aid, Toodles, tells the Assistant Commissioner that "They call it the beginning of social revolution. Of course, it is a revolutionary measure." (p.145). By "they" Toodles refers to the Tory opposition and particularly to the "brute" Cheeseman. "These fellows" says Toodles "have no decency" (p.145). But to

say this is to imply that there are certain rules of conduct which are, or should be, above the political debate. It is an institutional blindness borne out by Sir Ethelred's repeated insistence on "no details". One may be as revolutionary as one likes, but there are rules and conventions the breaking of which is not to be tolerated. Take, for example, the "volatile" Toodles:

Toodles was revolutionary only in politics; his social beliefs and personal feelings he wished to preserve unchanged through all the years allotted to him on this earth which, upon the whole, he believed to be a nice place to live on. (p.217)

Conrad's distinction between the political and the social is important. Evidently he does not much believe in the revolutionism of public men, and especially that of Sir Ethelred. For the social order has its rules as we have seen, and those at the pinnacle have not got there by breaking them. And we can see how little Conrad values parliamentary politics by the manner in which the House of Commons is pointedly referred to almost in the same breath as the "revolutionism" of Toodles. The Assistant Commissioner is on his way to report to Sir Ethelred:

Penetrating through a portal by no means lofty into the precincts of the House which is the House, par excellence, in the minds of many millions of men, he was met at last by the volatile and revolutionary Toodles. (p.214)

Against the background of the all-pervasive social forces at work in the world of The Secret Agent, Sir Ethelred and Toodles are irrelevant public servants playing the parliamentary game; which is irrelevant too in its way. Quite unofficial and private connections and considerations determine official policy over the Verloc affair. Inspector Heat has been

using Verloc privately, and he wishes to continue doing so, for it makes his job easier and has helped to secure his reputation. He therefore wishes to pin the blame on the innocent Michaelis. As chance would have it, however, the Assistant Commissioner is eager to steer attention away from that quarter, for Michaelis has a lady patron whose Salon regularly receives both him and his wife. His course of action is determined by one thought:

"If the fellow is laid hold of again... she will never forgive me." (p.112)

Importantly it is domestic arrangements such as these which lie at the heart of much of the action in The Secret Agent. The "legal" framework within which society operates is not made in Parliament, but on the hearthrug; which, incidentally, is the only place where it can be destroyed. Resignation and blindness, however, are the cornerstones of domestic ease. There are things which are not to be debated; not to be enquired of; not to be looked at. The poor and the down-trodden in the London world of The Secret Agent are the victims of a conspiracy, but Conrad's parliamentarians do not make suitable conspirators. As the Professor's own despairing insight tells him (for though he may be mad, he is not stupid), it is a conspiracy of millions.

This is in marked contrast to the élitist view of society we see in Nostromo. Conrad's shift of emphasis, however, should not be taken to imply that his views were dramatically reformed between 1904 and 1907. What it does mean is that Conrad's political sophistication (for he always eschewed simple formulas), extends to an appreciation of the very different conditions prevailing in very different countries. If we take together 'Heart of Darkness', Nostromo and The Secret

Agent, we can discern a delicate pattern whereby the role of leadership (not to mention the relevance of heroism), diminishes as social complexity or sophistication increases. The absolute monarchic power of Kurtz in his tribal kingdom gives way to the much more restricted oligarchic power of the 'leaders' in semi-feudal, backward Costaguana. Finally, in the modern, industrial and mercantile world of London, even those who officially lead are made irrelevant by the onward march of a million-headed social beast which is independent and uncontrollable, with an impetus and a direction entirely its own.

Powerful social forces, then, bite deep into the lives of revolutionaries and conservatives alike; and such forces are blind to the suffering of those who are buried beneath the indifference of the dark city. But they are also blind to the horror of modern human savagery; to the kind of sophisticated human relationships which can send a feeble innocent off with a bomb in his hand to get literally blown to shreds.

Critics have drawn our attention to, but not been much inclined to explore, Conrad's description of the knife-thrust with which Winnie Verloc despatches her husband (29).

Into that plunging blow, delivered over the side of the couch, Mrs. Verloc had put all the inheritance of her immemorial and obscure descent, the simple ferocity of the age of caverns, and the unbalanced nervous fury of the age of bar-rooms.
(p.263)

It has become commonplace to think of this passage as evidence of Conrad's belief that man is essentially a savage beneath the thin veneer of morality bestowed upon him by the march of civilization. I do not think such a view can be seriously

faulted, especially in view of the very same implications we find in 'Heart of Darkness'. But there is, nevertheless, a real danger of badly misinterpreting the scene. We might think, for example, that the horrific news of Stevie's death paralyses the "civilized" conscience of Winnie Verloc, who is thus reduced to a condition of primitive savagery. She then kills Verloc, very much as if she were some kind of ferocious cave-dweller whose natural propensity is for bloody aggression. To think like this, however, is to take the passage out of context. The phrases "simple ferocity" and "nervous fury" have about them the ring of uncontrolled aggression, as if Winnie had struck in a state of fevered emotional dislocation. But if we go back a couple of pages, we get a quite different impression:

She commanded her wits now, her vocal organs; she felt herself to be in an almost preternaturally perfect control of every fibre of her body. It was all her own, because the bargain was at an end. She was clear sighted. She had become cunning. She chose to answer him so readily for a purpose. She did not wish that man to change his position on the sofa which was very suitable to the circumstances. She succeeded. The man did not stir. But after answering him she remained negligently against the mantelpiece in the attitude of a resting wayfarer. She was unhurried. Her brow was smooth. The head and shoulders of Mr. Verloc were hidden from her by the high side of the sofa. She kept her eyes fixed on his feet. (p.261)

There are two points with regard to this passage that we should note. The first is that Winnie is in "perfect control". She is emphatically not a woman in a condition of blind rage. Conrad's image is very precise; his keen eye picks out the one detail which seems to sum-up her intense concentration on a single purpose: "She kept her eyes fixed on his feet". My second point is that here is a human being acting more nearly

like an animal than any other character in Conrad's fiction. In her slow approach and her careful manoeuvring she is exactly like a cat stalking its prey.

It would be easy to conclude that Winnie "regresses" to an evolutionary stage even further back than that of savagery. But to do so would be to misunderstand Conrad's point. His description of Winnie's act is just what it appears to be: a description of how, and not why. He is simply showing that man has not forgotten the murderous skills of his animal predecessors; that civilization has not eradicated man's instinctive knowledge of how to kill. It is quite unremarkable, in an age conscious of the origin of the species, that Conrad should be attracted to this view of man. But it would be a mistake to think that Conrad is somehow "explaining" Winnie's crime in terms of simple primeval aggression. Of course, he is implying that the "normal", "civilized" Mrs. Verloc is suspended for some minutes until the fast trickle of her husband's blood wakes her to the threat of the gallows. But the motivation for her decision to murder Verloc lies quite firmly in the breast of a twentieth-century woman, appalled, horrified and enraged by the hideous slaughter of her brother Stevie. Let us not forget, in thinking of her capacity to thrust a knife into her husband's chest, that Winnie has loved Stevie with a self-consuming maternal passion. The horror of his end (which in The Secret Agent is not "unspeakable"), fills her with "madness and despair". She kills Verloc not because she is a savage underneath, but because a malignant fate has had her by the throat, and because a "monster" has killed her child.

Conrad's vision was never a simple one, and Winnie's

murder of her husband is no exception. When she hears of Stevie's fate she is faced with a suffering she cannot refuse to look at, and cannot resign herself to. Just as Stevie is easily manipulated into destruction in vengeance for the cabman and his horse, so Winnie avenges her brother's suffering by destroying Verloc. At the crucial moment she even begins to look like her dead brother.

As if the homeless soul of Stevie had flown for shelter straight to the breast of his sister, guardian, and protector, the resemblance of her face with that of her brother grew at every step, even to the droop of the lower lip, even to the slight divergence of the eyes. (p.262)

Now there is a sense in which this similarity of facial appearance is merely symbolic of Mrs. Verloc's movement away from blindness, ("Mrs. Verloc opened her eyes" - P.260). But it is also illustrative of the way in which Conrad imposes supernatural patterns on human events.

By "supernatural patterns", I mean to refer to the way in which major events are foretold or mirrored by symbolic other events or spoken words. I think, for example, of Stevie's escapade with the fireworks, which anticipates a bigger and much nastier firework in Greenwich Park. Or, what in retrospect seems a truly savage irony, Mrs. Verloc's remark to her husband that Stevie would "go through fire for you" (p.184). And then there are Stevie's circles, which seem to anticipate and then to confirm the bombing.

Mr. Verloc was sitting in the place where poor Stevie usually established himself of an evening with paper and pencil for the pastime of drawing those coruscations of innumerable circles suggesting chaos and eternity. (p.237)

It is as if Stevie has been drawing his own fate. Chaos describes the explosion; eternity describes death. In this

way, events fall into place, as if each were pre-ordained. And Verloc, we read, "by a mystic accord of temperament and necessity, had been set apart to be a secret agent all his life" (p.180). If their professions are determined in advance, why not their fates?

There are, of course, those who would argue that all this is merely a matter of technique, or an expression of artistic purpose; that the whole ironic treatment of characters and events is some massive technical exercise. To an extent they would be right, but there is more to it than technique. Verloc "felt... vaguely" that there are "conspiracies of fatal destiny" (p.237), and I suspect that Conrad was temperamentally inclined to believe in them himself. Conrad's use of irony in The Secret Agent indicates a way of looking at the world; or a way of living with it. When we think of the awful wasted sacrifices endured by Winnie and her mother for Stevie's sake, we are surely getting an insight into the personal world of Conrad himself? His almost jovial handling of the dark, nightmarish events in The Secret Agent seems to reflect an effort to come to terms with an indifferent universe and a hostile fate. And perhaps all that his style in the novel shows us, is that he had courage enough to admit frankly that the earth and all mankind is in the grip of some obscene joker, or some cosmic Shakespearian fool.

I want finally, however, to address myself to the London setting of the novel and its all-pervading darkness. It seems to me that this terrible darkness of the capital is a theme it was quite commonplace for Victorians and Edwardians to explore. Indeed it was such a commonplace, and has been so well chronicled, that I do not need, nor do I have space

for, a detailed description. However, I do want to point out that although almost all writers of the period used the word "dark" as a metaphor, Conrad tends to use it to denote something different.

Whether we think of the great social explorers like the Booths, or of those writers of fiction who tried to capture the misery of the slums, from Mrs. Gaskell to J.H. Mackay, in all cases the word "darkness" is used to represent poverty, disease, ignorance and wretchedness. Their chosen metaphor was often simply a part of their philanthropic efforts to rouse an indifferent society into action. But Conrad's London, it seems to me, is not like theirs. His two working-class characters are both in work, and with money enough for gin. As they walk through the streets, his characters are not confronted with squalor and penury. And one is forced to add that Conrad in all probability never saw the inside of a hovel.

Conrad knows only that the streets are dark and damp.

He advanced at once into an immensity of greasy slime and damp plaster interspersed with lamps, and enveloped, oppressed, penetrated, choked, and suffocated by the blackness of a wet London night, which is composed of soot and drops of water. (p.150).

The Assistant Commissioner walked along a short and narrow street like a wet, muddy trench... (p.135)

Conrad knows that in London there is "darkness enough to bury five millions of lives" (p.xii), and that barely half a mile from the "very centre of the Empire on which the sun never sets" (p.214), there is at least one street where the "sun never shone" (p.258). There is, however, no positive appeal on Conrad's part for remedial action, in which he does not seem interested. His darkness, although perhaps grounded

in Poland's tragic past, is reminiscent of the pessimism of Social Darwinism. One may think, particularly, of James Thomson's powerful, though perhaps too intense, poem "City of Dreadful Night", in which is contained the following stanza:

"The world rolls round for ever like a mill;
It grinds out death and life and good and ill;
It has no purpose, heart or mind or will." (30)

This is the essence of the darkness of Conrad's London. It is not a darkness which stems from tangible poverty, but originates in the blackness of emptiness, purposelessness and meaninglessness. It is not, therefore, a darkness which can be lifted or mitigated by solitary man. Conrad's darkness stands for an indifferent universe and a malignant fate; for that fate which is a cruel teaser, seducing with illusions of security and hope, only to dash them in a travesty of justice. As young Stevie says, it is a "bad world for poor people". And Conrad is as helpless as he to change it.

The Secret Agent is dedicated to H.G. Wells, "the historian of the ages to come". In answer to the tentative positivism of A Modern Utopia, Conrad offers us his own vision of the modern world, where leaders are less and not more vital, and where society, a sightless compound leviathan, rolls on, no more and no less purposeless than before.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Irving Howe, Politics and the Novel (1957), New York, p.79.
2. Ibid., p.99.
3. Elliot B. Gose Jr., "Cruel Devourer of the World's Light: The Secret Agent" in Nineteenth Century Fiction, June 1960.
4. Norman Sherry, Conrad's Western World (1971).
5. George Woodcock, Anarchism (1963), p.436.
6. Howe, op. cit., p.97.
7. Woodcock, op. cit., pp. 88-9.
8. Max Stirner, The Ego and his Own (1971), Ed. by John Carroll, pp. 131-2.
9. Ibid., p.139.
10. Ibid., p.157.
11. Ibid., p.131.
12. C.B. Cox, Joseph Conrad: The Modern Imagination (1974), p.99.
13. Woodcock, op. cit., p.88.
14. Stirner, op. cit., p.151.
15. It may not be idle to speculate upon Conrad's decision to make the Professor an American. To an extent it seems to reflect Conrad's anti-romanticism. Shelley and others had looked to America as the home of a new, lawless and thus ideal, society. Conrad's vision of American anarchism, however, did not borrow from the romantic images of the "frontier". Instead, he saw the seed-bed of American anarchism in the dog-eat-dog competitiveness of unvarnished nineteenth-century capitalism. He thought, I imagine, that unfettered competition between individuals made the country fertile ground for anarchism. Which, indeed, it was. Conrad may have known little of the famous Chicago "Haymarket" bombing of May 1886, but it is likely that his attention was drawn to the circumstances of President McKinley's assassination. McKinley was shot dead in 1901 by one of Conrad's compatriots, Leon Czolgosz, who at his trial claimed to be an anarchist. And Conrad certainly knew something of "the gentle Emerson", who argued that
 Every actual state is corrupt. Good men must not obey
 the laws too well...Wild liberty develops iron conscience.
 Want of liberty, by strengthening law and decorum,
 stupefies conscience.
 (Quoted in Woodcock, op. cit., p.429)
16. Woodcock, op. cit., p.91.
17. Lucio Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin (1972), trans. J. Merrington & J White, p.63.

18. Ibid., pp. 55-6.
19. "Anatole France", Notes on Life and Letters (Dent), p. 37.
20. Howe, op. cit., p.97.
21. In P. Keating (ed.), Into Unknown England, 1866 - 1913 (1976), p.153.
22. Bruce Johnson, Conrad's Models of Mind (1971), Minneapolis, p.36.
23. See, for example, Fantasia of the Unconscious & Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious (1923).
24. See particularly, "Of love for one's neighbour" in Part 1, and also "Of virtue that diminisheth" in Part III.
25. Cox, op. cit., p.98.
26. Jacques Berthoud, Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase (1978), p.137.
27. Avrom Fleishman, Conrad's Politics (1967), Baltimore, p.190.
28. F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (1948), p.219.
29. For example, Berthoud, op. cit., pp. 152-3.
30. The City of Dreadful Night and other Poems (1888), p.23.
 Thomson's "night" is clearly of a similar kind to Conrad's for it is hardly a vision inviting of philanthropy. The poem has a Social Darwinist thrust -
 All substance lives and struggles evermore
 Through countless shapes continually at war (p.38)
 - which is missing from Conrad's work, but they nevertheless share basic assumptions about the pointlessness and irrelevance of human endeavour.

CHAPTER FIVE

Under Western Eyes: a study in political psychology

I

In Under Western Eyes, I believe, Conrad achieves the kind of impartiality or even-handedness he struggles for, but fails quite to find, in his earlier works. This is clear not merely because of the way he has taken care with those characters we might expect him to dislike, and hence to portray carelessly. What also stands out is his success in disengaging himself from his fiction, so that the guiding, or if one is cynical, manipulating, hand of the author seems less in evidence than in most of his previous works. We are thus much better able to judge for ourselves what he achieves in his efforts to explore the roots of political action.

I do not mean to suggest that Conrad makes no efforts previous to Under Western Eyes to distance himself from the fiction and thus to make his characters more independent of their creator. Conrad's frequent resource to narrators, such as Marlow, is an example of his desire to cure himself of his penchant for intrusive narrative comment. The problem with Marlow is that he stands far too close to Conrad himself and regularly becomes simply a mouthpiece for him. There are moments in 'Heart of Darkness', and I think in particular of Marlow's scorn for the manager of the Central Station, when one might struggle to slip a piece of paper between the two.

That same unwanted authorial presence is even more marked in Nostromo, where the want of an independent narrator offers little insulation between Conrad and the characters he creates. Inevitably, his personal likes and dislikes creep steadily in, so that his aristocrat is only snatched down from the heavens by the force of his tragic failure; and a fleeting glimpse of

Conrad's marxist photographer is enough to confirm his apparent view that revolutionaries are closely related to deformed animals.

In terms of his portraits of revolutionaries, Conrad's work steadily improves in tone and balance, so that his exiled Russian radicals in Under Western Eyes are very credible, and even powerful, creations. I think, for example, of his Sophia Antonovna whose fiery but sympathetic personality is very finely done. This, coming from an author capable of the grossest caricature, seems a remarkable transformation. But it would be quite wrong to think that Conrad, with Under Western Eyes, stops being the fiercely partisan political animal Nostromo, amongst other earlier works, shows him to be. The change, it seems to me, comes about not through an attempt to revise his conscious or unconscious politics, but through an intense and genuine desire to improve the quality of his fiction. We know that Conrad was a man who was easily dissatisfied with his work, and that he was always acutely conscious of its faults. I think it justifiable, therefore, to credit him with the realization that some of his characters are flawed by those, more or less secret, prejudices which have nothing to do with the poetic and political imagination which inspires the work and makes it what it is. There is no need, for example, for the narrator in The Secret Agent to punctuate his otherwise interesting account of the theories of the poor Michaelis, with splenetic gibes at the character's alleged "divine" delusions. Michaelis's religiousness is an artificial ingredient in his socialist make-up and its inclusion betrays Conrad's concern that his reader might be inclined to take seriously his revolutionary theories. Under Western Eyes, by contrast,

is a great success in its impartiality. It is an example of the way in which the need for honesty in fiction can triumph over the simple prejudices an author brings to his work.

It has sometimes been said that one cannot cheat a novel, that one cannot tell lies in it. It is an exaggerated claim. Even very good novels tell fibs once in a while, and here we can think of much of Conrad's work. There are times when even the greatest of artists will stoop to mere polemic, which is when the lie is told. The marxist photographer in Nostromo, for example, is a product of untruth; and yet the novel remains an extraordinarily powerful and great work. But it is certainly true that the lies are always the worst parts of novels, because they alienate the sensitive reader who won't be impressed by "characters" gratuitously dressed in fairy-lights or artificially plastered in dirt. In his long struggle to write effectively about politics, that is a lesson which Conrad appears to learn.

How does he achieve impartiality in Under Western Eyes? Partly, the answer lies with the greatness of the vision which inspired the work. As an exploration of national souls, the novel is perhaps over-ambitious, but as an evocation and a rebuff of the Dostoyevskian spirit, it has an intensity which discourages pettiness or spite. For the rest, impartiality in the novel is the product of the independence of Conrad's narrator, the teacher of languages. He differs from Marlow in that he does not speak for Conrad, or for some kind of 'official' authorial viewpoint. Nor does he have all the answers; in Under Western Eyes, the reader has to make his own way because his "guide" is himself in the dark. The teacher of languages has his own highly suspect vision of the world,

which Conrad is able to explore, and which conditions his reactions to the Eastern events he relates.

II

He rather despised the English insularity, which so readily brushes aside what does not interest it, so easily misjudges the real aim of various movements, and has such fixed ideas...He did not think the English were stupid, like so many foreigners do, but he thought, I imagine, that they were far too self-satisfied. (1)

In such a manner was Conrad's attitude to the English summed up by his close friend Richard Curle. Although few will be persuaded of its veracity if they happen to believe otherwise, I would argue that Curle's statement accurately expresses the essential spirit of Conrad's view of the English mentality. I agree that Conrad saw the English as insular and self-satisfied, not because he gave direct expression to such a view - if he did I have not come across it - but because it is writ large in the pages of several of his major fictional works. It is there, implicitly, in The Secret Agent. Of that there can be no doubt. But it is evident also in the several caricatured Englishmen who grace the pages of Conrad's novels and short stories, from 'Typhoon' to Under Western Eyes, and for this reason the continuity so implied forms a convenient starting-point for this section of the chapter.

My first reaction to the teacher of languages who acts as our guide and informant in Under Western Eyes was that I had met him before. After giving the matter due consideration I found that this opinion had been strengthened. Our caricatured Englishman has grown a little in stature, he has become more weighty in his words and less reticent about his guiding principles, and certainly more intelligent than his predecessors;

but essentially he is the same person. Of course, there is very little in him of Conrad's earliest narrator, Marlow, and even less in him, perhaps, of Jim. But these are, in a way, exceptions to the rule. On the contrary, Conrad's archetypal Englishman does not meditate upon the mysterious workings of mankind in the manner of Marlow, or indulge in the fantastic romanticism of Jim. His feet are, so to speak, very firmly on the ground; in that lies his strength, his charm, and his chief limitation. His first and most easily identifiable incarnation is in the figure of Captain MacWhirr in 'Typhoon'. His second and more complex life is lived out in the Costaguana of Nostromo in the person of Captain Mitchell. But he is created afresh, with more subtlety and with greater depth, as a teacher of languages amongst the political intrigues of exiled Russians in the tiny democracy of Switzerland. No accident that; for he joins in that country a kindred spirit, in a long dead Swiss philosopher whose influence lives on.

'Typhoon' opens with the following passage:

Captain MacWhirr, of the steamer Nan-Shan, had a physiognomy that, in the order of material appearances, was the exact counterpart of his mind: it presented no marked characteristics of firmness or stupidity; it had no pronounced characteristics whatever; it was simply ordinary, irresponsible, and unruffled. (2)

As the tale progresses it becomes more and more clear that MacWhirr is "irresponsible" to the point of obtuseness. One piece of humorous dialogue should suffice for an example. The first-mate, Mr. Jukes, says, "Even up here I feel exactly as if I had my head tied up in a blanket." MacWhirr's reply is typical: "D'ye mean to say, Mr. Jukes, you ever had your head tied up in a blanket? What was that for?"(3)

Although it is difficult to imagine a Ship's Master so

ludicrously obtuse, such nonsense illustrates what we have already been told of MacWhirr's mentality.

Having just about enough imagination to carry him through the day, and no more, he was tranquilly sure of himself... It was, in truth, as impossible for him to take a flight of fancy as it would be for a watchmaker to put together a chronometer with nothing except a two pound hammer and a whip-saw in the way of tools.

(4)

MacWhirr's stupidity, however, is not merely comic, for it constitutes his strength. Since he is lacking in imagination he does not respond to the terror of the storm and remains amazingly, perhaps unbelievably, calm. At the height of the typhoon Mr. Jukes, a much more perceptive and imaginative individual altogether, falls prey to his more thorough understanding of the storm. He suffers from the collapse of his resolve. He panics and seizes up, unable to act, just as Jim abandons his duty precisely because he can imagine the full horrors that would accompany the collapse of a bulkhead. That which, in one sense, makes Jim and Jukes superior to MacWhirr - their ability to see life whole and as it is - also makes them, in a different sense, inferior.

Captain MacWhirr had sailed over the surface of the oceans as some men go skimming over the years of existence to sink gently into a placid grave, ignorant of life to the last, without ever having been made to see all it may contain of perfidy, of violence, and of terror. There are on sea and land such men thus fortunate. (5)

MacWhirr is sound because he is incapable of seeing the potential horrors that lie behind surface realities; which is, of course, a theme which Conrad explores more fully in 'Heart of Darkness'.

Captain Mitchell of Nostromo represents a sort of half-way house between MacWhirr and the teacher of languages. He is more intelligent than MacWhirr, and more pompous with it,

taking on part-time, as it were, the role of narrator which the teacher of languages is later to exploit more fully. Again he recognizes the surface truths but suffers from a crucial failure of the imagination, which results in his inability to identify the true character of men or of events. His view of the drama which is being played around him in Sulaco is like that of a colour-blind man examining a colour photograph. Form, in its most basic aspects, he understands; but the intricate patterns of colour and shade which have their own reality and their own truth, are utterly beyond his perception. It is precisely this inability to see hidden realities which makes him see Costaguanan history in a simplistic, almost story-book, fashion. Thinking himself profoundly knowledgeable, he bores his guests with his tales. He sees history being made but he does not understand it.

As with MacWhirr, however, Mitchell's manifest simplicity of vision constitutes his strength. In this respect he is brilliantly contrasted with S  n  r Hirsch whose imagination renders him susceptible to the crippling effects of terror. It does not occur to Captain Mitchell that Sotillo is perfectly capable of inflicting pain upon him as a practical measure of coercion, because he never questions the norms of behaviour to which he is an heir as an Englishman. Which goes a great deal towards explaining why the Professor's mission in The Secret Agent is such an hopeless one.

In the last chapter, I tried to demonstrate how The Secret Agent is deeply ambivalent about the achievements of English society. In that novel, Conrad suggests that the body politic of his adopted land is built on the rock of blind subservience to the dictates of convention. But, like a rock, it is

unseeing and unresponsive, unaware of the raging seas that crash around it daily. And Winnie Verloc (whose motto that "things don't stand much looking into" illustrates at least that she is more conscious of her own assumptions than MacWhirr and Mitchell are of theirs), is one of the few who are forced to look beneath the surface of practical every-day realities. What it does to her is suggestive of the latent insecurity of all social and political systems; and that message, amongst other things, is an indication of the subtlety and the maturity of Conrad's political vision.

Under Western Eyes was to prove Conrad's last great political novel and it constitutes, I believe, his final statement on the political world. Whether because of some inadequacy in his conception, or his execution, or because of a lack of application on the part of his readers, the novel has not yet given up all its secrets. But the greatness of Under Western Eyes lies in its complex vision and in the fact that it seeks to understand politics in its widest sense. It deals primarily not with political issues as such, but with the stuff of which politics is composed: the fundamental assumptions and modes of thinking which constitute the base-rock on which political convictions are founded.

As I have already indicated, the teacher of languages in Under Western Eyes represents the English view which can be seen at its crudest in Captain MacWhirr. He also represents, as Jacques Berthoud (more or less alone amongst Conrad scholars) points out, a kind of rationality (6). Precisely what sort of rationality he stands for I shall come to presently, but first I shall endeavour to show that the blind complacency which is exhibited by MacWhirr and Mitchell is a characteristic

which he shares with them.

One of the most striking features of Under Western Eyes is the disparity between the complexity of the events on the one hand, and the simplicity of the commentary provided by the narrator on the other. He is honest enough to tell us, several times, that he does not understand the Russians, and the briefest of examinations of his attempts to do so is sufficient to explain why. He begins from the perfectly credible view that Russian psychology is fashioned by the political conditions operating in that country.

The origins of Mr. Razumov's record is connected with an event characteristic of modern Russia in the actual fact: the assassination of a prominent statesman - and still more characteristic of the moral corruption of an oppressed society where the noblest aspirations of humanity, the desire of freedom, an ardent patriotism, the love of justice, the sense of pity, and even the fidelity of simple minds are prostituted to the lusts of hate and fear, the inseparable companions of an uneasy despotism. (p.7)

In such a manner does the teacher of languages attempt to direct the reader's attention to what he sees as the essential truth behind the events which he is about to relate. But to suppose, as some commentators have (7), that the narrator speaks unambiguously for Conrad, acting as a sort of moral standard by which the other characters can be measured, is to accept that the tale itself endorses the veracity of his views. On the contrary, however, his understanding of events and characters is a partial and simplistic one. If we consider, for example, just one of the sympathetically treated characters in the novel, Tekla, we see that such things as a "sense of pity", and the "fidelity of simple minds" can flourish even under the cloud of despotism which hangs over her and the other Russians in the novel. Tekla's self-sacrifice and her capacity for suffering

has not been "prostituted" to anything. It is surely the case that great heroism can result only from a great conflict? In the dull monotony of a ~~perfected~~ environment, heroism would be out of place. Jocelyn Baines writes that it is "one of the most significant aspects of the book that despite Peter Ivanovitch's undeniably heroic behaviour Conrad does not present him as a hero, but recounts his experiences in Siberia ironically..." (8) Isn't this rather begging the question? Who is doing the presenting, Conrad or the teacher of languages? Thus one of the several things which the narrator fails to understand is how such a nobility of spirit can co-exist with what is for him a horrifying political system. What he understands even less is the fact that both these things share an identical genesis in the spirit of Russia itself. Failure to differentiate between on the one hand, that behaviour and outlook which comes from within because they are Russians, and on the other, that which is imposed upon them because they live under a despotic regime, leads him to suppose that all their actions are prompted by the latter. He attributes even the most understandable and basic of human reactions to this omnipotent tyranny.

I had the mental vision of Mrs. Haldin in her armchair keeping a dreadful, tormenting vigil under the evil spell of an arbitrary rule: a victim of tyranny and revolution, a sight at once cruel and absurd. (p.335)

In this way, the narrator will not allow Mrs. Haldin a personal sorrow, nor will he acknowledge the universality of grief. He has to put it down to a politics with which he disagrees.

Strangely, the old teacher of languages comes very close to grasping the difficulty he faces. He very rightly draws attention to the different conditions of thought prevailing in

the West from those in the East.

...this is not a story of the West of Europe.

Nations it may be have fashioned their Governments, but the Governments have paid them back in the same coin. It is unthinkable that any young Englishman should find himself in Razumov's situation. This being so it would be a vain enterprise to imagine what he would think. The only safe surmise to make is that he would not think as Mr. Razumov thought at this crisis of his fate. He would not have an hereditary and personal knowledge of the means by which a historical autocracy represses ideas, guards its power, and defends its existence. By an act of mental extravagance he might imagine himself arbitrarily thrown into prison, but it would never occur to him unless he were delirious (and perhaps not even then) that he could be beaten with whips as a practical measure either of investigation or of punishment.

This is but a crude and obvious example of the different conditions of Western thought. (p.25)

With this, the teacher of languages seems to have understood not only that Razumov has been fashioned by the world in which he lives, but also that he himself has been so fashioned. But at the same time the tone of his observation demonstrates that he has been unable to make that crucial mental leap which alone might catapult him to full awareness. In his pronouncement lurks a smug, self-satisfied tone, indicative of an unquestioning acceptance of his own inherited notions of decency and good sense. Like Toodles in The Secret Agent, who cannot understand how the "beastly Cheeseman" could fail to 'play the game', the teacher of languages is at a loss to comprehend that there may be other modes of thinking, other values, which may have their own validity. He can understand that Russia is incapable of fundamental change (and that is one of the central themes in Under Western Eyes as we shall see), but it does not occur to him to question the virtues of his own inherited mode of thinking.

In order to understand more fully the nature of that inherited mode of thinking, though we have glimpsed it before in MacWhirr and Mitchell, we must turn our attention to a key scene in which the philosophies of East and West meet to do battle. This is the scene in which Nathalie Haldin attempts to explain to the narrator her belief that "concord is not so very far off" (p.104). She is insistent that the Russian dilemma is of a kind very different from those encountered in Western Europe.

"You think it is a class conflict or a conflict of interests, as social contests are with you in Europe. But it is not that at all. It is something quite different." (p.104)

A statement of this nature is, to the teacher of languages, deeply confusing, and he is more than willing to dismiss it as absurd nonsense without troubling to solicit an explanation. Nevertheless, his response is illuminating.

That propensity of lifting every problem from the plane of the understandable by means of some sort of mystic expression, is very Russian. I knew her well enough to have discovered her scorn for all the practical forms of political liberty known to the Western world. (p.104)

The narrator is right in insisting that Nathalie Haldin is contemptuous of the "practical forms of liberty known to the Western world", but her scorn for them is understandable in that she is convinced of the historical and cultural unity of her nation; she cannot accept the 'agreement to differ' which is a feature of Western democracies. But we cannot fail to notice the narrator's commitment to "practical forms" and his cynical dismissal of some kind of alternative. To assert that the convictions of those of a different culture to one's own are incomprehensible is to admit the validity of Winnie Verloc's motto that "things don't stand much looking into" and

to endorse the suggestion that the English are smugly self-satisfied and insular.

The political notions of the teacher of languages spring from and are geared towards practical realities. Practical matters, as in the case of MacWhirr, are what the English are good at; though assuredly Conrad puts it more eloquently. It may be significant that Conrad had tried to read Mill's Principles of Political Economy (9), for, given the eminently practical nature of economic matters, the very phrase "political economy", or for that matter "utilitarianism", must have seemed to him symbolic of a typically English approach to political issues. The fundamental tone of Mill's work is set by his preliminary remarks, in which he comments that

In every department of human affairs, Practice long precedes Science: systematic enquiry into the modes of action of the powers of nature is the tardy product of a long course of efforts to use those powers for practical ends.(10)

Nearer Conrad's own time, that practical or "scientific" approach to politics which is a feature of Mill's work, was vigorously upheld by Beatrice and Sydney Webb, leading figures in the Fabian movement. The Webbs believed fervently in a science of politics and demonstrated what to many must have looked like an obsession with the collection of facts, figures, and sundry miscellaneous data. To have an exact knowledge of practical realities was the bedrock of their approach to politics. Such an approach left itself open to two important criticisms. First, for those who perceived a dire necessity for immediate action, the Webbs' tortuous process of analysis, data collection and argument was too slow and restrictively detailed. As one study of the Fabians comments, "while the Fabians debated, the unemployed demonstrated" (11). Their

attitude was a source of annoyance to H.G. Wells and others in the movement who shared his frustration with the pedestrian political leadership of the time (12).

The second criticism of the Webbs' overly practical approach, and one which was eloquently voiced by Wells, was that it was obsessed with order and took little account of the less measurable things in life. In The New Machiavelli, the story of his erratic flight through Fabian politics, Wells lampoons the Webbs, thinly disguised as the Baileys.

With me beauty is quite primary in life; I like truth, order and goodness, wholly because they are beautiful or lead to beautiful consequences. The Baileys either hadn't got that or they didn't see it..... I came to realize that our philosophies differed profoundly.....Theirs was a philosophy devoid of finesse....Altiora [Beatrice] thought trees hopelessly irregular and sea cliffs a great mistake...." (13)

Whilst Conrad was unlikely to have agreed with Wells on the first of these criticisms, he would, I believe, have wholeheartedly endorsed the second. He believed that life was a thing characterized by delicate shades; the world a place peopled by shadows as much as by flesh and blood. Only in this way can we explain the fact that darkness is a central motif in Conrad's work: in the African jungle; in London; in the Golfo Placido. The latent blackness of the human world and particularly of the human subconscious, is a dominant part of the Conradian vision. As Decoud writes in Nostromo, "all this is life, must be life, since it is so much like a dream" (14).

In the devotion to practical realities exhibited in the utilitarians and in the Webbs, we may detect a genuine tendency in English political and social thought which forms the basis

for the type of rationality expressed by Conrad's teacher of languages. "Life", says the narrator of Under Western Eyes, "is a thing of form. The most idealistic conceptions of love and forbearance must be clothed in flesh as it were before they can be made understandable" (p.106).

Whilst the philosophy of the teacher of languages is efficacious, because it is practical, it leaves him unable to experience the totality of the world in which he lives. He is a solid character on whom Miss Haldin can depend, but he is so only because he has no imagination with which to see the profoundly disturbing alternative reality which was the constant companion of Conrad himself. And Conrad's sophisticated vision in Under Western Eyes is expressed in the fact that the narrator is unable to understand the Russian mind because it inhabits that other reality from which his blinkered vision debars him.

Berthoud writes that the teacher of languages is "on his guard against metaphysics" (15), which, given his philosophy, is unquestionably true. But there is in the novel another pair of Western eyes, whose owner, whilst often sporting the apparel of metaphysician, is as western as his English counterpart. That figure is Jean Jacques Rousseau who, for Conrad, personified the cult of reason without imagination; of logic without inspiration. For all they seem to be nominal antagonists, the earth-bound teacher of languages and the heaven-bound Rousseau are uncomfortable bed-fellows in the spiritual and mental East-West divide that informs the structure of Under Western Eyes.

III

But before we go further it is necessary to deal with an apparent problem. Since what is contained in the novel appears to come to us solely through the voice of the teacher of languages, and since his is a partial voice, surely what we see of Rousseau in Under Western Eyes should not be attributed to Conrad himself? This would be a perfectly reasonable conclusion were it not for the fact that much of the tale is taken from Razumov's diary, and we have no reason to assume that the teacher of languages is unfaithful to it. When he declares that he has not falsified anything we must believe him on the grounds that, although he may be limited in his understanding, it would not occur to him to lie. I would couple with this observation two others. First, that some of the references to Rousseau are made by Razumov in his diary, and others by the narrator in his separate capacity as a participant in the action. Second, that the tone in both cases is contemptuous in a broadly identical manner. For these reasons I am content to accept the proposition that, with regard to Rousseau at least, the attack is directed by Conrad himself.

Conrad's treatment of Rousseau in Under Western Eyes is symbolic rather than direct, and is effected through descriptions of the Swiss scenery. This is how the island named after Rousseau is described:

...a hexagonal islet with a soil of gravel and its shores faced with dressed stone, a perfection of puerile neatness. (p.290)

In a comment which we might attribute to Razumov's diary, but which we in fact know to be Conrad's, we are told that

There was something of naive, odious, and inane simplicity about that unfrequented tiny crumb of earth named after Jean Jacques Rousseau. Something pretentious and shabby, too. (p.290)

As the images build up we become more and more aware of the simple dullness of the Swiss scenery, so subtly yet forcefully associated with Rousseau. The "Boulevard des Philosophes", we are told, is an "empty" and "singularly arid and dusty thoroughfare" (p.115). The lake which had in real life, if we are to believe The Confessions, aroused profound emotions in the breast of the Swiss philosopher, has a "precise, orderly, and well-to-do beauty", which "must have been attractive to the unromantic imagination of a business man" (p.143). The implications of these comments are best understood in the light of Conrad's declared opinion of Rousseau which is to be found in A Personal Record.

He had no imagination, as the most casual perusal of "Émile" will prove. He was no novelist, whose first virtue is the exact understanding of the limits traced by the reality of his time to the play of his invention. Inspiration comes from the earth, which has a past, a history, a future, not from the cold and immutable heaven. (16)

This illuminating comment implies much more than that Rousseau did not have his feet solidly on the ground. Whether based on a reading of The Social Contract, or on the summary of that work which appears in Émile, Conrad echoes here a criticism of Rousseau common amongst the irrationalists of the nineteenth century. Several philosophers, amongst them men as disparate as Burke and De Maistre, took The Social Contract for a universally exportable plan, and thus as a blueprint for nations without culture or history (17). They believed their own powerfully imagined view that the enlightenment (of which they saw Rousseau's ideas as typical) postulated a

history of the world which was incompatible with the dictates of reason. They pictured Rousseau as a perverted and in some cases almost demonic individual, plotting the end of all history and replacing it with a world created according to the principles of disembodied reason. Edmund Burke, for example, criticised the thinkers of the enlightenment for seeing society in simple mechanistic terms, and opposed it to his own notion of a living, organic polity owing its character and its very existence to its historic past.

...a nation is...an idea of continuity, which extends in time as well as in numbers and in space. And this is a choice not of one day... it is a constitution made by what is ten thousand times better than choice, it is made by the peculiar circumstances, occasions, tempers, disposition, and moral, civil, and social habitudes of the people, which disclose themselves only in a long space of time. (18)

Clearly, when Conrad writes that inspiration "comes from the earth, which has a past, a history, a future, not from the cold and immutable heaven", his criticism of Rousseau is fundamentally the same as that of Burke. That is not to say that their views are identical, for Burke owed much to that British Empiricist tradition which derives from John Locke, for which the mode of thinking of the teacher of languages acts as a convenient symbol. Burke's insistence that the "science" of government is "practical in itself" and intended for "practical purposes" (19), is indicative of an outlook on the world which recognizes the infinite variation and complexity of the cultural and historical life of a nation but places its emphasis on doing rather than understanding. In fact it is implicit in his assumptions that the totality of the life of a nation cannot be understood by mere mortal man. His philosophy, therefore, suffers from precisely the same limitation as that of the narrator of Under Western Eyes.

Conrad's estimation of Rousseau, then, must have been that much lower, for he characterized him as a man who either ignored the subtler shades of political and social life, or who endeavoured to banish them in favour of the sterile, almost arithmetical logic which is a feature of The Social Contract. Such a sterile rationality must of necessity expel the imaginative faculty from the otherwise limited range of mental processes; and Conrad, as an artist, must have found that profoundly contemptible.

If, in Conrad's eyes, Rousseau's rationality is a failure in terms of explaining the nebulous and evanescent truths of the external world, it also profoundly misunderstands the nature of our inner psychological processes. For Conrad, the human psyche is composed not only of the rational conscious mind, but also of an unexpressed, hidden world which is no less real and no less valid. In A Personal Record he calls this entity 'conscience' and describes it thus:

that heirloom of the ages, of the race, of the group, of the family, colourable and plastic, fashioned by words, the looks, the acts, and even by the silences and abstentions surrounding one's childhood; tinged in a complete scheme of delicate shades and crude colours by the inherited traditions, beliefs, or prejudices - unaccountable, despotic, persuasive, and often, in its texture romantic. (20)

Conrad's appeal to the 'conscience', that more elusive inner world which we all recognize (though possibly by different names), is neither transient nor incidental. It is, in many ways, the essence of his art. In his much remarked upon Preface to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', Conrad argues that the artist seeks to bring to light the fundamental truths which underlie our existence, in a manner no less valid than the enquiries of scientists or philosophers. Although writing,

perhaps, pro domo, he insists that the appeal of the artist is a more abiding one.

Confronted by the same enigmatical spectacle the artist descends within himself, and in that lonely region of stress and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of his appeal. His appeal is made to our less obvious capacities: to that part of our nature which, because of the warlike conditions of existence, is necessarily kept out of sight within the more resisting and hard qualities - like the vulnerable body within a steel armour. His appeal is less loud, more profound, less distinct, more stirring - and sooner forgotten. Yet its effect endures for ever. The changing wisdom of successive generations discards ideas, questions facts, demolishes theories. But the artist appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition - and, therefore, more permanently enduring. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives... (21)

In the same Preface, Conrad writes that his task is above all to make his readers "see" (22); to see not only the surface realities of human life but also the truths that lie beneath them. The "gift" of which he speaks in the above passage is the gift of inspiration or imagination; that gift of which, in Conrad's considered opinion, Rousseau was bereft. The stuff of life for Conrad is vapid as well as concrete, nebulous as well as invested in form. But the Rousseau of Conrad's imagining is unable to see that, and wants to re-draw the world along the lines suggested by the laws of arithmetical knowledge. We can appreciate the extent of Conrad's contempt when we consider that he dubbed no less a figure than Archimedes, "an absent minded person with a mathematical imagination. Mathematics command all my respect, but I have no use for engines" (23).

Being convinced that ideas, however arithmetical, call

forth corresponding consequences in the historical world (as we have seen elsewhere), Conrad sought, and thought he had found, a Rousseauistic kingdom on earth. Under Western Eyes portrays Geneva, the city of Rousseau's birth and exile, and its inhabitants, as the spiritual heirs to The Social Contract. At one point in the novel, the teacher of languages observes

...a solitary Swiss couple, whose fate was made secure from the cradle to the grave by the perfected mechanism of democratic institutions in a republic that could almost be held in the palm of one's hand. The man, colourlessly uncouth, was drinking beer out of a glittering glass; the women, rustic and placid, leaning back in a rough chair, gazed idly around. (p.175)

Their mechanical democratic institutions and the smallness of their republic serve to connect this couple with their spiritual mentor. But we cannot fail to notice the epithets: "colourless"; "uncouth"; "rustic"; "placid"; "idle". The Swiss, then, are a people without vitality or refinement. They represent the lowest common denominators of human existence. Their connection with Rousseau is re-enforced when Razumov, seeing an old workman on a bench, mutters to himself

"Elector! Eligible! Enlightened!" ... "A brute all the same" (p.204)

Thus we have a people portrayed as if they had been spirited up from the cold and unenlightened depths of the mind of Jean Jacques Rousseau; a nation without a past and with a future as colourless as the blinkered political vision of which Conrad has made them a part.

The Swiss, Rousseau and the teacher of languages, then, are representatives of a kind of rationality, a kind of reason utterly divorced from the imaginative thought processes which Conrad valued so highly. They offer us a brief glimpse into

a world sharply contrasted with that inhabited by the Russians in the novel. Theirs are the Western eyes which are turned uncomprehendingly in the direction of Tartary.

IV

We have it on good authority that Conrad detested Dostoyevsky (24). And yet Under Western Eyes is full of references and allusions to, and echoes of, Dostoyevsky and his work, particularly Crime and Punishment. I shall argue in due course that Dostoyevsky powerfully represented for Conrad the worship of the irrational; that Dostoyevsky had become for him an unlovely phantom; a ghost which Under Western Eyes attempts to lay. In this sense the novel may have been cathartic. However, although Conrad scholars have recognized the similarities between Conrad's novel and Crime and Punishment, few if any have attempted either to catalogue those similarities or to enquire into the implications that lie behind them. This is perfectly understandable, given the dangers not only of mis-reading Crime and Punishment oneself, but also of inaccurately estimating the impression the novel made on Conrad. I believe, however, that these are risks which have to be taken if we are to secure a full grasp of the complexities of Under Western Eyes. To this end I have appended a summary of my reading of Crime and Punishment (Appendix A), which will reveal the assumptions upon which I have based my enquiry into the relationship between the two novels.

Under Western Eyes contains three more or less direct allusions to Crime and Punishment. First, in the account of Peter Ivanovitch's escape from Siberia, we are told of a

pale-faced girl...who had come out to the mines to join one of his fellow convicts, a delicate young man, and a social democrat, with broad cheekbones and large staring eyes. She had worked her way across half Russia, and nearly the whole of Siberia to be near him. (p.121).

This, of course, reminds us of Sonia, gone off to follow her Raskolnikov. Nor is it insignificant that the young social democrat is a mechanic. Crime and Punishment is essentially an exploration of the dangers of Western ideas, particularly those stemming from the English Utilitarians. Raskolnikov, therefore, is a "mechanic" in the sense that he falls prey to a utilitarian calculus which, in its crudest form, believes that human happiness can be secured by means of simple arithmetic (25).

A second allusion to Crime and Punishment can be found in the same account, in which we hear that Peter Ivanovitch

...had become a dumb and despairing brute, till the woman's sudden, unexpected cry of profound pity, the insight of her feminine compassion discovering the complex misery of the man under the terrifying aspect of the monster, restored him to the ranks of humanity. This point of view is presented in his book, with a very effective eloquence. She ended, he says, by shedding tears over him, sacred, redeeming tears, while he also wept with joy in the manner of a converted sinner. (p.124)

Although Ivanovitch is based partly (but not in any serious way), on Bakunin (see Appendix B), the above passage has an unmistakeable ring to it. It reads like a thinly disguised and satirical account of the literally unbelievable scene at the end of Crime and Punishment in which Raskolnikov suddenly finds his salvation through the love of Sonia (26).

Finally, towards the end of Under Western Eyes, Razumov tells himself that he had

"neither the simplicity nor the courage nor the self-possession to be a scoundrel, or an

exceptionally able man. For who, with us in Russia, is to tell a scoundrel from an exceptionally able man?..." (p.362).

This it seems is a parting shot at Dostoyevsky, the reference, of course, being to Raskolnikov's agonizing over whether he is a "louse" or a "napoleon". It is an allusion that is all the more striking because it is clearly a deliberate 'plant'. The question which Razumov is moved to ask of himself bears little relation either to its immediate context or to the novel as a whole. The difficulty that Russians find in distinguishing between a "scoundrel" and an "exceptionally able man" is germane to the character Ivanovitch, as I hope to demonstrate, but it is not a line convincingly spoken by Razumov.

Even more striking than these allusions is the atmosphere of Part One of Under Western Eyes which brilliantly re-creates the mood of Crime and Punishment. In fact in that section of the novel, Razumov is so like Raskolnikov, at least in terms of their mental states, that it is difficult to believe that Conrad was not deliberately attempting to re-create the ex-student of Crime and Punishment. The most dominant motif of both novels in this respect is hallucination. Razumov, for his part, has difficulty in deciding what is real and what is not, as when he is alone in his room with Haldin and begins to suspect that his bird has flown.

The silence had lasted a long time. "He is no longer here," was the thought against which Razumov struggled desperately, quite frightened at its absurdity. "He is already gone and this...only..." (p.57)

Similarly, Raskolnikov is subject to outbreaks of irrational thought. Alone in his room after murdering the old money-lender, he is horrified by an absurd notion.

It was then that a strange thought occurred to him, the thought that perhaps all his clothes were covered with blood, that perhaps there were lots of bloodstains, but that he did not see them... (27)

Neither Raskolnikov nor Razumov seem able fully to control their own thoughts; both almost give themselves away to their respective interrogators.

If we consider the following passage, we see that there are virtually two distinct persons co-existing in Raskolnikov.

Raskolnikov's eyes glittered; he was terribly pale; his upper lip quivered and began to twitch. He bent down as close as possible to Zamyotov and his lips began to move, but no sound came from them. This went on for half a minute; he knew what he was doing, but he could not control himself. The terrible words trembled on his lips, like the bolt on the door that day; another moment and out it would come, another moment and he would utter it!

'And what if it was I who murdered the old woman and Lisaveta?' he said suddenly and - recovered his senses. (28)

Clearly, what is happening here is that some part of Raskolnikov's mind, a hidden and secret part, has gained temporary ascendancy over his conscious mind and is urging him to confess. Whilst not reflected in the passage I have quoted, Raskolnikov's schizophrenia is composed of this: that his conscious rational self operates in opposition to his subconscious non-rational self. As the novel progresses, however, the subconscious side of him gains increasing control over his thoughts and actions until the final scene in which the last vestiges of his rational self evaporate in a blinding flash of inspiration. 'Inspiration' is in fact precisely the right word for it is literally almost the last word in Under Western Eyes.

Not surprisingly, Razumov is also caught in the mental turmoil which accompanies a divided self. He manages to

suppress a "diabolical impulse" to tell Haldin that he has given him up to the authorities (p.55). Later, at the Château Borel, he is not totally in control of his reactions or, for that matter, his speech.

All day long he had been saying the wrong things. It was folly, worse than folly. It was weakness; it was this disease of perversity overcoming his will. (p.253)

Exactly like Raskolnikov, Razumov's conscious rational mind is faced with intermittent and growing subversion from his deeper, subconscious urges. Again like Raskolnikov, he is forced ultimately to confess his guilt. In both cases, their confessions are by the normal order of things irrational acts. And yet both, in a sense, represent solutions to their psychic conflicts. However, for all the similarities between the two characters there are important differences which reflect the philosophical differences between Conrad and Dostoyevsky. The most important of these is that Raskolnikov's inner self, his subconscious, is naturally good, whereas Razumov's is not, as we shall see when we come to consider his betrayal of Haldin. It is this important disagreement about the nature of human psychology that forms the basis of Conrad's rebuttal of the Dostoyevskian Universe.

Razumov prides himself on being a rational being. Haldin calls him a "self-contained, thinking" man (p.19), and takes note of his "frigid English manner" (p.16) and, isolating himself from the student world, he keeps "an instinctive hold on normal, practical, everyday life" (p.10). The name "Razumov", as many commentators have observed, is derived from the Russian "razum", meaning literally reason. He is therefore a 'son of reason'. However, the central character

is so called not because he represents reason, or a kind of reason as Jacques Berthoud suggests (29), but because he represents the fate of reason in Dostoyevskian Russia. In a world in which the truth is dictated on the one hand by God, and on the other by "The People" (acting in the same capacity), Razumov's reason is effective only insofar as he can live out a solitary existence. But once the "absurd" breaks in upon him, in the form of Haldin, his reason is threatened by the choice he is forced to make between two non-rational philosophies. They are non-rational because for the revolutionary as for the autocrat in Under Western Eyes, truth cannot be discovered through the exercise of reason, but only through revelation.

The Russian world of Under Western Eyes is a world of Slavophiles. Significantly, it was in the 1870s and the 1880s that the Slavophil movement was at its zenith. It was essentially an intellectual revolt against European influences and a "belief that the solution for Russia's problems must be found in her own history and peculiar institutions" (30). As a movement it was both reactionary and revolutionary. On the one hand it emphasised the historical and cultural importance of the monarchy and the orthodox church as the cornerstones of Russian society. On the other, the revolutionary version glorified the peasantry and claimed for it broadly similar virtues. Although it had predecessors going back to the seventeenth century (31), the Slavophilism of the nineteenth century, coinciding with the growth of nationalism and historical philosophies elsewhere in Europe, was a backlash against Western ideas first imported by the army returning from France after the defeat of Napoleon. The first 'Westerners' of the nineteenth century were the decembrists, whose defeat in 1825

marked the beginning of a recoil which threw Russia back upon itself; a recoil which gained added impetus with the almost universal defeat of the revolutionary cause in 1848. When in 1836 Peter Tchaadayev published his famous A Philosophic Letter in the Moscow journal Telescope, which condemned the entire history of Russia and called for stronger ties with Europe, he was officially declared insane (32). The Slavophilism of the mid-nineteenth century "saw in unpurged Russian history a youthful force with its own innate strength and virtue, rooted in the people and the orthodox church, destined to supersede the West and to become the universal civilization of the future" (33). Like the theories of Hegel in Germany, Burke in England, and De Maistre in France, this particular brand of nationalism featured an attack on the rationalism of eighteenth century Europe. It denied the efficacy of human reason in attempting to understand the world in which we live and turned instead to an essentially irrationalist mode of thought by which the human purpose, crystallized in human history, could be known only through an intuitive knowledge of the divine purpose. The Slavophiles often spoke of "Holy" Russia and thought it unique in having a messianic role to play in the salvation of Europe and the world.

A brief discussion of some of the well-known figures should serve to add depth to the above description of the heterogeneous Slavophil movement. Amongst those on the right Constantin P. Pobedonostsev, though arguably not strictly speaking a Slavophil, shared many of the views I have mentioned. He thought, for example, that rationalist philosophy and abstract ideas in general were amongst the curses of the nineteenth

century. Although he read avidly many nineteenth-century thinkers, including Comte, Marx, Darwin and Fourier, "he thought that the Russian Orthodox Church possessed the truth and that a determined intellectual search for truth was both wasteful and dangerous" (34). Perhaps a better example would be Dostoyevsky himself, to whom Pobedonostsev was a close friend and confidant. Dostoyevsky was an ardent Pan Slav and he was convinced that European civilization was in decline. He believed that the future by some kind of divine right belonged to Russia and that the Russian People had a mission to free the Balkan Slavs from Ottoman tyranny. Thus in The Diary of a Writer (1877), he

Firmly pronounced that Russia fought the Turks in order to preserve the life and liberty of the oppressed Southern Slavs...His country was fighting not only for the unity of its Slav brothers, but for a spiritual alliance of all those who believed that Russia, at the head of a united Slavdom, would bring by its self-sacrifice a message of universal service to mankind. (35)

Dostoyevsky believed also, as we see in Crime and Punishment, that the Russian soul had the capacity to overcome the harmful effects of an imported Western rationalism. Raskolnikov's distressed and confused mental state, as I have indicated, is a product of his conscious mind, with its faithless imported rationality, being pitted against his true, decent, inner Russian self. In this way he is able to dismiss Russian problems as the products of a creeping infection carried via Jews and Poles from the West.

On the revolutionary side, the Slavophilism which is to be found amongst leading Russian thinkers is less spectacular and certainly more ambivalent - but it is there nonetheless. Even the erstwhile 'Westerner', Alexander Herzen, who went into

voluntary exile in 1847, became increasingly disenchanted with Western liberalism and was converted to the Slavophil belief in the value of the peasant commune.

...what a blessing it is for Russia that the rural commune has never broken up, that private ownership has never replaced the property of the commune: how fortunate it is for the Russian people that they have remained outside all political movements, and, for that matter, outside European civilization... (36)

Herzen was quick to see the connection which others (like Marx, for example) saw between democracy and the bourgeoisie.

Sharing Tocqueville's fear that the former might end in the reign of universal mediocrity (37), (as indeed it does in Under Western Eyes), he also developed a loathing for the petty bourgeoisie and particularly of the role it played in France during the Second Empire (38).

As I indicated earlier, the typically Slavophil combination of nationalism on the one hand, and irrational or non-rational modes of thinking on the other, is a central concern in Under Western Eyes. The closer we look at the Russian characters in the novel, the more we recognize the Slavophil tendency. That there are in the fictional figures, as in the real ones, important differences of outlook between the revolutionaries and the autocrats is not to be denied. But that they share a similar mentality, a similar approach to the acquisition of truth, is more central to the Conradian vision of Russia which Under Western Eyes presents. As he says in the Author's Note, "The oppressors and the oppressed are all Russians together..." (p.x).

Beginning with the autocrats, the character of Mr. de P- serves to set the tone for the rest. He is, we are told, a "fanatical, narrow-chested figure in gold-laced uniform, with

a face of crumpled parchment, insipid, bespectacled eyes and the cross of the Order of St. Procopius hung under the skinny throat" (p.7).

The name "Procopius" reminds us of Byzantine and the Eastern Church, thus hinting at the importance of the Orthodox Church in the Russian political system, and this is reinforced by the addition of sainthood. We notice also that Mr. de P- wears spectacles; a sign, perhaps, of fanaticism or unscrupulousness in Conrad's fiction, as in the case of the Professor in The Secret Agent. Conrad himself, of course, wore a monacle. It might be worthy of note also that Mr. de P-, as he is described above, would look rather like Pobedonostsev. (39)

Mr. de P- had a "mystic acceptance of the principle of autocracy" (p.7).

In the preamble of a certain State paper he had declared once that "the thought of liberty has never existed in the Act of the Creator. From the multitude of men's counsel nothing could come but revolt and disorder; and revolt and disorder in a world created for obedience and stability is sin. It was not Reason but Authority which expressed the Divine Intention. God was the Autocrat of the Universe..." (p.8)

Although we might have wished to see more of the autocrats in Under Western Eyes, Mr. de P- is excellently handled. A minor figure, essential only for the purposes of the plot, the brief portrait we are given of him succeeds in introducing a specifically Russian mode of thought which is to be explored in more depth in the rest of the novel. His statement is a confession of faith. What stands out in it, other than his obvious belief in the sanctity of patriarchy, is his rejection of reason in favour of the received wisdom of the Orthodox Church. It is in this sense that his autocracy is mystical; he sees himself not as a persecutor and tyrant, but

as a True Believer engaged in a holy war, sanctioned by church and state.

The goggle-eyed General T- is obviously fair game for satirical treatment in the same vein as that meted out to Mr. de P- . Rather like General Trepov, the one-time Governor of St. Petersburg who was shot by Vera Zasulich in 1876 and whose injuries were warmly received even in establishment circles (40), he would be a comic figure were he not so outrageously barbaric. His existence, he tells Razumov and Prince K- , is "built on fidelity"; fidelity to, we may suppose, the state, the church and the Tsar. He tells them that he cannot help it; it is a "feeling" (p.51). In other words his autocratic beliefs are not built on a rational assessment of the merits and demerits of political and social institutions, but on gut-feeling. How this gut-feeling or inspiration comes to him or from whence, he neither knows nor cares. Cynical in his attitude to human nature, and like Mr. de P- , he presides over the destruction of the hopes of the young. With a splendidly ironic symbolism, Conrad makes General T- the owner of a statue of a young man running. Prince K- comments, "Spontini's. 'Flight of youth'. Exquisite." A few pages later, we are told that "Haldin...might have posed for the statue of a daring youth, listening to an inner voice". Exactly so: Haldin is not inspired by the voice of reason, but by the angelic voice of destiny.

Councillor Mikulin, by contrast, is a thoroughly efficient fellow, not given to delivering enraged speeches on the evils of reaction or revolt. Whilst all the other autocrats are in one way or another mystics, Mikulin, though displaying, perhaps, a "devotion to church and throne" (p.305), has his

feet very firmly on the ground.

Prince K- 's mysticism was of an artless kind;
but Councillor Mikulin was astute enough for
two. (p.307)

It is, however, the scheming Mikulin who, with a fine understanding of his environment, recognizes the fundamental nature of the Russian conflict. In order to remain at ease with the state, "The principle condition" he says, "is to think correctly" (p.90). Thus at the most basic level the tsarist regime in Under Western Eyes is fighting an intellectual conflict; a war of ideas. But it is only in the context of the novel as a whole that we perceive a more striking meaning. It is not merely what one thinks that is important, it is also how one thinks. In order to remain at one's ease in Russia one must be prepared to think intuitively and not rationally. Mikulin's inability to think in the right way makes his eventual downfall more important to the novel's overall structure than it would otherwise have been. Significantly, he is treated with sympathy and even with respect for he is not a fanatic nor an irrationalist.

Autocracy in Under Western Eyes would be inadequately represented were it not for the fact that Razumov is frequently a spokesman for it. Although, if anything is clear in the novel, it is that Razumov has no single identity, he is certainly more of an autocrat than he is anything else. Like the other autocrats, he is highly nationalistic. He tells Mikulin: "I am not an intellectual mongrel. I think like a Russian" (p.90). Again we see the identification between the fact of being Russian and a specifically Russian mode of thinking. But the Razumov who speaks here is not the same man as the Razumov who sits dreaming of the silver

medal. Faced, as I have already suggested, with a choice between two non-rational philosophies, his reason has failed him. In surrendering control over his own actions to the seductive claims of mysticism, he has ceased to be the person that he was. Conrad cleverly upends one of our dearest assumptions, for, amid the snows of Russia, Razumov undergoes a descent into inspiration.

He cast his eyes upwards and stood amazed. The snow had ceased to fall, and now, as if by a miracle, he saw above his head the clear black sky of the northern winter, decorated with the sumptuous fires of the stars. It was a canopy fit for the resplendent purity of the snows...

He responded to it with the readiness of a Russian who is born to an inheritance of space and numbers...

It was a sort of sacred inertia. Razumov felt a respect for it. A voice seemed to cry within him, "Don't touch it". It was a guarantee of duration, of safety, while the travail of maturing destiny went on... What it needed was not the conflicting aspirations of a people, but a will strong and one: it wanted not the babble of many voices, but a man - strong and one!

Razumov stood on the point of conversion...

In Russia, the land of spectral ideas and disembodied aspirations, many brave minds have turned away at last from the vain and endless conflict to the one great historical fact of the land. They turned to autocracy for the peace of their patriotic conscience as a weary unbeliever, touched by grace, turns to the faith of his fathers for the blessing of spiritual rest. Like other Russians before him, Razumov, in conflict with himself, felt the touch of grace upon his forehead...

The grace entered into Razumov. He believed now in the man who would come at the appointed time. (pp. 33-34)

Razumov's conversion, which I have condensed in the above passage, contains all the salient features of the Dostoyevskian frame of mind. Dostoyevsky, of course, was amongst those Russians who "turned away" from the "vain and endless struggle". As a young man he was a member of the Petrashevsky circle, which was unanimous in its opposition to

autocracy and to serfdom, and demanded equality before the law, the abolition of censorship, and the erection of a democratic republic (41). However, after his arrest in 1849 and his subsequent exile at Omsk in Siberia, he took an increasingly anti-European line, which was eventually to throw him into the arms of Pan Slavism. Increasingly as he grew older he put his faith not in reason - a false and easy Western ideal - but in the stern Russian truth, revealed by history and sanctioned by the church.

As with Dostoyevsky, so with Razumov. His deliberations do indeed constitute a conversion; he discovers the truth, like Saul on the road to Damascus, through divine intervention. Not the work of God, perhaps; but certainly the call of Russian destiny and suitably embellished with a messianic faith.

By the time of his conversion, of course, Razumov has already attempted to rid himself of Haldin by going to Ziemianitch. That attempt having failed, his next thought is to return to his lodgings and kill the young assassin with his own hands. He knows very well, however, that the "corpse hanging round his neck would be nearly as fatal as the living man" (p.32). His one remaining alternative is to betray Haldin to the authorities, and his conversion justifies in advance his decision to do so.

Razumov stood on the point of conversion. He was fascinated by its approach, by its overpowering logic. For a train of thought is never false. The falsehood lies deep in the necessities of existence, in secret fears and half-formed ambitions, in the secret confidence combined with a secret trust of ourselves in the love of hope and the dread of uncertain days. (pp. 33-34)

Razumov's conversion then, is not in truth the result of divine intervention, but comes from his "secret" self, his subconscious self. Unlike Dostoyevsky's pure and good inner being, the Conradian subconscious is composed as much of our secret fears and our instinct for self-preservation as it is of the legacy of our childhood experiences.

In betraying Haldin, however, Razumov also betrays himself. Not only does he suffer from a crucial failure of his reason, he also destroys the carefully tended independence of which he is so proud. The irrationality of his act is made manifest by the fact that he attempts to save his mental independence by throwing it away. From that moment on, until he regains control of his own thoughts by confessing to the revolutionaries, a different person walks the streets of St. Petersburg and Geneva; he is controlled by the mysticism he has given himself up to.

Then came an illness, something in the nature of a low fever, which all at once removed him to a great distance from the perplexing actualities, from his very room even. He never lost consciousness; he only seemed to himself to be existing languidly somewhere very far away from everything that had ever happened to him... And when he had got back into the middle of things they were all changed, subtly and provokingly in their nature: inanimate objects, human faces, the landlady, the rustic servant-girl, the staircase, the streets, the very air.
(p.298)

It is as if the conscious being that is called Razumov is in a state of suspended animation, symbolised by the stopping of his watch at the fateful hour. Locked in this underworld Razumov lives amongst the phantoms, with the ghost of Haldin pursuing him at every step. As if observing him from a great height, his conscious mind, exiled but still functioning, recognizes that he is the puppet of unseen forces.

"And, after all," he thought suddenly, "I might have been the chosen instrument of Providence. This is a manner of speaking, but there may be truth in every manner of speaking. What if that absurd saying were true in its essence?" (p.301)

Clearly, something in him suspects the truth:

Was it possible that he no longer belonged to himself? (p.301)

Razumov's decision to betray Haldin to the authorities is made possible by the fact that he considers himself without moral bonds.

"Betray, A great word. What is betrayal? They talk of a man betraying his country, his friends, his sweetheart. There must be a moral bond first. All a man can betray is his conscience. And how is my conscience engaged here; by what bond of common faith, of common conviction, am I obliged to let that fanatical idiot drag me down with him?..." (pp.37-38)

We will not be deceived by this. In a moral sense (and what other should there be?) Razumov is guilty. What of the bond of common humanity? Or the bond of Haldin's faith in him? We cannot help but be reminded of 'The Secret Sharer' in which the Captain responds to the appeal of Leggatt, unable to disavow the kinship that lies between them. Not wishing to go into the details of that story, I will not push the comparison further. It is enough to say that one of the differences between the Captain and Razumov is that the latter is incapable of acknowledging the validity of the saying, "There but for the grace of God go I".

Razumov's betrayal of Haldin is closely associated with his bastardy. As we have seen, for Conrad, as for Freud, the subconscious, or at least a part of it, is formed by our earliest associations and memories; and that associated with the name "Razumov" is no exception. An orphan, both officially and in fact, "no home influences had shaped his opinions or

his feelings". Instead, his parentage is "defined in the statement that he was a Russian" (p.11), and Razumov suffers the same resultant turmoil as would the child of a broken home,

This immense parentage suffered from the throes of internal dissensions, and he shrank mentally from the fray as a good-natured man may shrink from taking definite sides in a violent family quarrel. (p.11)

In this lies the necessity for Razumov's independence, for to commit himself to one side or the other is to take up arms against himself. It is the reason also, therefore, for his love of solitude. ^{Since he is} torn between two irreconcilable forces it is a strategy which enables him to live in an otherwise unlivable situation. Just as Haldin is Razumov's victim, so too is Razumov a victim; a victim of the "despotic" nature of a conscience built on conflict.

This strategy of isolation and independence, however, is doomed to failure. What guarantee had he that the "absurd" would not walk in upon him as he sat there; what defence had he against the intrusion of the irrational forces by which he, as a Russian, was surrounded?

"An absurdity may be the starting-point of the most dangerous complications. How is one to guard against it? It puts to rout one's intelligence..." (p.198).

With the arrival of Haldin, Razumov is forced to enter the world, a world for which he is morally ill-equipped because his moral education has been blind to the claims of common humanity: to enter the world is to take up the mantle of moral responsibility and inevitably this is a burden which he cannot carry. Deception and self-deception are all that is left of his rationality once it is faced with the political and psychological divide. Without the direction provided only by coherent moral values, intelligence is mere guile,

and reason is mere rationalisation of our baser instincts. Human reason is indeed useless, as the Slavophiles supposed, but it is only so when it is denied the moral direction which can be supplied only by a "coherent social and cultural context" (42).

Razumov's capacity for self-contained existence collapses under the weight of a burden of misfortune which he cannot throw off. Significantly, his chief virtue is his capacity for work, which proves thoroughly inefficacious in his moral quandary. This seems at odds with much of Conrad's earlier fiction which concedes to work the status of a saving grace. Compare, for example, Razumov with Singleton; a child of the sea contrasted with a child of the land. The distinction seems of little consequence given the emptiness and dangers of both. Razumov, of course, is an intellectual and Singleton is not. But what would Singleton have done if he had found himself in Razumov's shoes? Where would his loyalties lie? These, of course, are unanswerable questions, for Singleton would not be the same man if we were to transport him to Russia. But the comparison at least serves to underline the fact that Razumov's loyalties don't really lie anywhere. His bastardy cuts him off from the normal roots of loyalty, and he does not even have the benefit of a shared code of conduct such as exists for Leggatt and the Captain in 'The Secret Sharer'.

Razumov, then, has the psychological freedom which allows him to betray a fellow man whose nobility of spirit can hardly be denied. At the same time this useless manoeuvre forces him to deny a part of his own self. Built on such shaky foundations, however, his mystical conversion to autocracy is never altogether firm. Quite rightly, Razumov detests

General T- , who is for him the "incarnate suspicion, the incarnate anger, the incarnate ruthlessness of a political and social regime on its defence" (p.84). On the other hand, his encounter with Ziemianitch offers him a means of rationalizing his surrender to mystical autocracy.

Conrad is insistent that Ziemianitch should be regarded as a typical Russian peasant. The name itself is derived either from the Russian zemlya or, more likely, from the Polish zemia, both of which mean land or earth. Furthermore, in the space of three pages we are told twice that Ziemianitch is a "true Russian man", once that he is a "proper Russian driver", and once that he is a "proper Russian man" (pp.28-30). Later, after he has learnt of Ziemianitch's suicide, Razumov notes that he had fallen into mysticism and adds that it is "Very characteristic" (p.283).

He felt pity for Ziemianitch, a large neutral pity, such as one may feel for an unconscious multitude, a great people seen from above - like a community of ants working out its destiny. (pp. 283-284)

The news of Ziemianitch's suicide, though it makes Razumov's position in Geneva secure, affects Razumov in subtle but profound ways. It awakens in him the one important emotion which had previously been absent - pity. It is this more than anything else which counter-balances his contempt for the Russian people and leaves the way open for his confession to the revolutionaries. At the time of his encounter with Ziemianitch, however, his reaction had been somewhat different.

Ziemianitch's passionate surrender to sorrow and consolation had baffled him. That was the people. A true Russian man! Razumov was glad he had beaten that brute - the "bright soul" of the other. Here they were: the people and the enthusiast.

Between the two he was done for. Between the drunkenness of the peasant incapable of action and the dream-intoxication of the idealist incapable of perceiving the reason of things, and the true character of men. It was a sort of terrible childishness. But children had their masters. "Ah! the stick, the stick, the stern hand," thought Razumov... (p.31).

It is thus the attitudes of Razumov and Haldin to the typical Russian peasant Ziemianitch which marks the difference between them. Razumov, for his part, begins with cynicism and arrives by a perfectly logical route at autocracy. Haldin, however has called Ziemianitch a "bright soul". He idealizes the people and is consequently determined to oppose a political and social regime which remains complacent about their suffering.

Haldin's views are summarised in a letter which Nathalie Haldin reads to the teacher of languages.

"They make only such a small handful, these miserable oppressors, before the unanimous will of our people...

Of course the will must be awakened, inspired, concentrated....That is the true task of real agitators. One has got to give up one's life to it. The degradation of servitude, the absolutist lies must be uprooted and swept out. Reform is impossible. There is nothing to reform. There is no legality, there are no institutions. There are only arbitrary decrees. There is only a handful of cruel - perhaps blind - officials against a nation." (p.133)

Much of this may seem perfectly reasonable outside the context of the novel, but within it there can be no doubt that Haldin is a hopeless idealist: a romantic, certainly. Conrad has made him so by making him wrong in so many of his suppositions. Ziemianitch may be a "bright soul" but he is also a drunken brute. The peasant's famous team of horses which are to spirit Haldin away, turn out to be "three shaggy little horses" (p.29). Haldin, of course, even thought Razumov "unstained,

lofty" (p.135), whereas in fact nothing could be further from the truth. He is, therefore, absurdly generous in his estimation of the people; optimistic in his estimation of the future. Although cynicism may be a word which informs the actions of many of the characters in Under Western Eyes, it is not a term which can be meaningfully applied to the young assassin.

For much of the novel, then, Razumov and Haldin are divided by different conceptions of human nature. But it would be more accurate, perhaps, to say that they are divided by different experiences of the Russian peasant. Ultimately, Razumov receives a different impression of Ziemianitch, albeit a second-hand impression, and this entails a re-structuring of his views. He can no longer justify autocracy (to which he can never be fully reconciled) on the grounds that the Russian peasant is merely a brute and therefore requires stern government for his own good. Ziemianitch's suicide is a mark of some enduring quality which sets him above the base opinion which Razumov had previously held of him. Significantly, Razumov's confession to the revolutionaries is, amongst other things, an attempt to clear the peasant's name.

The mysticism that overtakes Razumov and is a feature of both the Dostoyevskian world of Crime and Punishment and of the Slavophil movement is also evident in the revolutionaries of Under Western Eyes. The most coherent expression (and defence) of it can be found in the passage referred to earlier in which is contained the discussion between Nathalie Haldin and the teacher of languages. In response to the former's insistence on the inevitability of a golden age of concord in Russia, the narrator comments that "one must be a Russian

to understand Russian simplicity, a terrible corroding simplicity in which mystic phrases clothe a naïve and hopeless cynicism" (p.104). What can this mean? What is a naïve cynicism? The implications of the two words stand in direct opposition to one another. Jacques Berthoud attempts to solve this riddle by arguing that cynicism, at least in common speech, refers to the dismissal of the claims of virtue. Adjusting the meaning only very slightly, he puts the view that a child is therefore cynical because he does not respect the claims of convention. He is naïve in that he has not yet "internalized", "invisible norms and rules"; hence the connection which Razumov makes between children and cynicism (43) :

"We are Russians, that is - children; that is - sincere; that is - cynical." (p.207)

Unfortunately, such an explanation, though intriguing, fails to reconcile the contradiction between naïve and cynical. If cynicism means what he says it means, it threatens our normal conception of the word 'naïve'. Surely, 'naïve' has something to do with not knowing? Whilst 'cynical' implies a negative reaction positively arrived at. A norm or convention, by definition, implies a commonly accepted belief. Thus its rejection must necessarily be described by the word 'scepticism' and not 'cynicism'.

There is, however, a sense in which Nathalie Haldin is both cynical and naïve, and it is exactly the same sense in which these terms apply to Slavophilism. Miss Haldin is naïve in that, despite all the evidence to the contrary, she persists in believing in the forthcoming reign of peace and harmony. Like the Slavophiles, she sees a golden future for her country as an historical necessity. At the same time, her very optimism is rooted in cynicism in that it requires

the rejection of rational thinking. She is cynical not about human nature - we can hardly doubt her faith in that - but about the capacity of reason to unravel the mysteries of the historical world. As she says, "The whole world is inconceivable to the strict logic of ideas... There must be a necessity superior to our conceptions" (p.106). In this she echoes the irrationalist philosophy of the Slavophiles who, faced with the disturbing realities of their time, could embrace hope only by evolving a theory of history which denied the importance of reason and based its appeal on the seductive powers of intuition. Paradoxically, they were in this respect much influenced by German Romanticism. Early German romantic thinkers, philosophers such as Herder, Fichte, Schelling and Friedrich Schlegel, whatever their differences in other respects, joined together in rejecting the mechanistic categories of the eighteenth century. They introduced doubts about the competence of the sciences of man such as psychology, sociology and physiology, to "take over, and put an end to the scandalous chaos of, such human activities as history, or the arts, or religious, philosophical, social, and political thought." (44) They "returned to ways of knowing which they attributed to the Platonic tradition; spiritual insight, 'intuitive' knowledge of connections incapable of scientific analysis." (45)

The narrator, however, displaying a splendid wrong-headedness, accuses Nathalie Haldin of looking forward to an "era of disembodied concord" (p.106). Miss. Haldin, however, is quite convinced of the reality of the golden age that lies ahead, for she has absolute belief in an historical destiny. For her, history, past, present and future, is real. It is

the power of reason that is illusory. Her understanding of the world is intuitive, and her simplicity resides entirely in her rejection of the "strict logic of ideas".

Similar assumptions are evident in Razumov's famous credo:

History not Theory.
Patriotism not Internationalism.
Evolution not Revolution.
Direction not Destruction.
Unity not Disruption. (p.66).

What is interesting about this particular statement of faith is that it opposes all the things which nineteenth-century irrationalists attributed to the enlightenment. Avrom Fleishman interprets the credo in terms of what he calls the "organicist" tradition, insisting that the theory of the organic state can be seen in the values presented therein; "evolution through history in the direction of patriotic unity." (46) He couples this with the argument that the statue of Rousseau has its significance "in terms of the theory of the organic state, of which Rousseau was a major source" (47). However, whilst the values implied in the credo are indeed essential features of an "organicist" theory of the state, it is wrong to think of Rousseau as an organicist in the context of Under Western Eyes. As I indicated earlier, Burke saw Rousseau not as an organicist but as a mechanist, as did Conrad himself. This is precisely what Razumov has in mind when he wants "History not Theory". As he tells Haldin, "My tradition is historical. What have I to look back to but that national past from which you gentlemen want to wrench away your future?" (p.61). What Fleishman does not seem to be aware of, is the image of Rousseau accepted by dozens of irrationalist thinkers throughout the nineteenth century. For Burke as for the Slavophiles, the watchmaker's son exemplified the

eighteenth-century belief in the perfection of reason and the poverty of history. Whilst it was left to Hegel to attempt to reconcile the two, for men like Herder and Fichte, no less than for the Slavophiles, truth could only be conceived historically. Their insistence on history as culture-struggle marked the beginnings of nationalism in Germany, just as similar ideas did in Russia. Herder in particular was hostile towards Rousseau and preferred mysticism to rationalism. Even more extreme, de Maistre saw a connection between the rationality of The Social Contract and the twisted personality he thought he saw in The Confessions. Seeing in the French revolution a connection between extreme rationality and violence, his was effectively a study of political psychopathology (48).

Razumov's credo, then, implies an absolute identification of nineteenth-century Russian revolutionaries with eighteenth-century enlightenment thinkers. The importance of his nationalistic views in this respect cannot be exaggerated, because to the Russian Right, as well as the Russian Left, the enlightenment means France. Razumov's faith in the unity and purity of the Russian nation induces him to suspect that there must lurk within it elements not truly Russian which alone account for the difficulties it faces. Revolutionism, for him, is clearly a product of insidious Western ideas penetrating and corrupting the body politic. In his interview with Mikulin, this is made perfectly clear.

"I am reasonable. I am even - permit me to say - a thinker, though to be sure, this name nowadays seems to be the monopoly of hawkers of revolutionary wares, the slaves of some French or German thought - devil knows what foreign notions. But I am not an intellectual mongrel. I think like a Russian. I think faithfully..."
(p.89-90)

Razumov's nationalism, however, is more extreme than this. He begins to suspect that an agitator or revolutionary who is not a fool or a charlatan cannot be a 'true' Russian. This can be seen in his dealings with Sophia Antonovna who is impressed by the rhetoric of the French revolution: "Crush the Infamy! A fine watchword!" (p.263). Following closely on this utterance, Conrad, with his sophisticated eye for detail, has Razumov question her 'Russianness'.

How un-Russian she looked, thought Razumov. Her mother might have been a Jewess or an Armenian or - devil knew what. (p.264)

In case this should not be enough, Conrad makes the anti-semitism in Razumov's nationalism transparently obvious through the character's encounter with the venomous propagandist Julius Laspara.

Razumov backed against the low wall, looked after him, spat violently and went on his way with an angry mutter - "Cursed Jew!"

He did not know anything about it. Julius Laspara might have been a Transylvanian, a Turk, an Andalusian, or a citizen of one of the Hanse towns for anything he could tell to the contrary. (p.287)

Whatever Julius Laspara is, we gather, he is most certainly not a 'true' Russian.

This sort of thinking is reminiscent of that of the anti-Dreyfusades in France. The Dreyfus affair focused the emergent anti-semitism that was a feature of the French Right of the period. The Catholic press carried on a furious anti-semitic campaign: how, it was asked, could this Jew be innocent? (49) By 1890 all sections of public life in the Third Republic had been compromised. It was argued that 'true' Frenchmen could not have been responsible for the mess that France was in. The enemy, therefore, was within. How

could France have lost the war with Prussia in 1870-71 unless this were so? Drumont argued that the war had been engineered by Jewish bankers in a bid to corrupt and plunder France.

Amongst the Russian Right similar ideas abounded. Nicholas II, for example, equated Jews with subversion and became a paying member of the anti-semitic Union of the Russian People (50). Plehve, the infamous Minister of the Interior, "instigated a number of pogroms - at Kishinyov on Easter Sunday 1903, and again at Gomel in August-September 1903 - in the hope of "drowning the revolution in Jewish blood" (51). Pobedonostsev and Dostoyevsky, in their corrosive comments on the Jews, were typical of the anti-semitism of their time. They believed all the common charges made against Jews: cosmopolitanism, financial power and corruption, materialism, influence over the press and publishing, responsibility for liberalism and socialism (52).

Thus Razumov's anti-semitic outburst is compatible with nineteenth and early twentieth-century nationalism including that which prevailed in Russia as well as elsewhere. For all of Conrad's emphasis on the importance of national sentiments, he had at least the decency to admit that extreme forms of nationalism are abhorrent; and his inclusion of this aspect of it in Under Western Eyes gives us an indication of his political awareness and knowledge of European movements which, compared with writers like, for example, H.G. Wells, makes many of his contemporaries look positively parochial in their political understanding.

In thinking the revolutionaries to be somehow not truly Russian, however, Razumov is utterly wrong. Most of them, including Nathalie Haldin as we have seen, share several of

his beliefs and in particular they share his commitment to History, Patriotism and Unity. If we examine some of the revolutionary figures in Under Western Eyes we find in differing degrees the same sort of mysticism which marks the thinking of Razumov at the time of his conversion. Madame de S-, for example, is quite open about her belief in a holy revolution. "In matters of politics", she says, "I am a supernaturalist" (p.222)

"The liberating spirit would use arms before which rivers would part like Jordan, and ramparts fall down like the walls of Jericho. The deliverance from bondage would be effected by plagues and by signs, by wonders and by war" (p.223)

Similarly, but to a much lesser degree, Sophia Antonovna also speaks of the revolutionary cause in religious terms. Significantly, she insists that she has been "looking neither to the left nor to the right" (p.245). Only half a page later, she repeats the same phrase with "right" and "left" reversed. She too believes in the inevitability of the historic process, telling Razumov that "Everything is bound to come right in the end." (p.245). When Razumov says "You think so?", she replies, "I don't think, young man. I just simply believe it." It is clear that what matters to the revolutionaries is not "theory", as Razumov had supposed, but "history". They are all convinced that God is on their side, that they have a divine mission to make the inevitable revolution happen. It is a mark of their disregard for the dictates of logic that none of them seems aware of the contradiction involved in trying to make a revolution happen and at the same time believing it to be inevitable. The capacity which most impresses them is the capacity for

inspiration. In the words of Sophia Antonovna, "It is not for us to judge an inspired person." (p.249) She refers, of course, to Peter Ivanovitch.

Ivanovitch is a curious mixture of guru and charlatan. His books, the titles of which closely resemble the titles of some of Tolstoy's works (53), are commonly regarded as inspired. There is, however, a manifest ambivalence about both his inspiration and his revolutionism. For example, he does not regard the nobility in Russia as the enemy of the revolutionary cause, nor even as a problem (p.211). What, then, is he fighting against? This is a question to which we do not receive an answer, a curious fact given that Ivanovitch is the most influential of the revolutionaries. On the other hand, he would not be the character he is if he were to express himself clearly, for his reputation as an "inspired" man rests upon his capacity for clothing his convictions in mystical or metaphorical phrases. In common with the teacher of languages, we may suspect that beneath the veil of rhetoric there resides an ideological vacuum. He tells Razumov that

"there yawns a chasm between the past and the future. It can never be bridged by foreign liberalism. All attempts at it are either folly or cheating. Bridged it can never be! It has to be filled up." (p.211)

Ivanovitch, we notice, is making the right noises in rejecting "foreign liberalism" in favour of more radical means. Razumov responds by saying that "surely whole cartloads of words and theories could never fill that chasm....a sacrifice of many lives alone-..." (p.212) To bridge a gap or a chasm, one can most certainly understand. But to distinguish "bridge" from "fill up" as these metaphors apply to practical realities,

or to anything except actual chasms, is thoroughly incomprehensible. How is it that Ivanovitch could expect Razumov to understand? And how is it that Razumov implies that he does? The Russian characters in the novel are constantly seeking confirmation that they have been understood, and yet clearly none of them is. It is no wonder that Razumov can say one thing and be understood to mean something entirely different. "Words", as the teacher of languages says, "are the great foes of reality" (p.3).

In a brilliantly conceived scene, Razumov is able to make use of the duplicity of words in his dealings with Ivanovitch. He says to him,

"I have been impelled, compelled, or rather sent - let us say sent - towards you for a work that no one but myself can do. You will call it a harmless delusion: a ridiculous delusion at which you don't even smile. It is absurd of me to talk like this, yet some day you will remember these words, I hope. Enough of this. Here I stand before you - confessed! (p.228-229)

Razumov has confessed and yet not confessed, because words, at least between Russians, can so often be misinterpreted.

Mysticism, then, is a disruptive force. Whilst it unites them in the sense that it implies a common rejection of the claims of Western rationalism, it divides them one from the other in a sea of misunderstanding and duplicity.

Ivanovitch is of course also fraudulent in his professed feminism. Although he claims that nothing can be done without women, he shows scant respect for them, with the possible exception of Sophia Antonovna. All of the others he is content to exploit in any manner he chooses. There is the obvious example of Tekla, whose simple anarchist principles at least have the virtue of clarity. Although

she is duped by popular opinion into thinking him a "great" man, and an "inspired" man, she recognizes that he is an "awful despot" (p.232). As one commentator notes, the revolutionaries are "blind to the suffering in literally their own house" (54). The fact of the matter is that Ivanovitch does not see womankind as a superior force before which one should bow down in deference, but as a tool to be used, a commodity to be exploited for his own ends. The failure of the revolutionaries to understand the true natures of those around them is a measure of the failure of their irrationalist mode of thought. Their simple faith, lacking, perhaps, the healthy scepticism about their own kind acquired only through the exercise of reason, leaves the Russians open to manipulation by charlatans like Ivanovitch. In this sense the last line of Under Western Eyes possesses a kind of dramatic force. Sophia Antonovna tells the narrator that "Peter Ivanovitch is an inspired man". It is Conrad's final dismissal of the claims of mysticism.

In keeping with Conrad's conception of the Slavophil revolutionary, Ivanovitch is contemptuous of Western ideas.

"Everything in a people that is not genuine, not its own by origin or development, is - well - dirt! Intelligence in the wrong place is that. Foreign-bred doctrines are that. Dirt! Dregs!" (p.211)

Although such an outburst captures much of the tone of nineteenth-century Slavophilism, it is a hopeless exaggeration of the mistrust in which the West was commonly held by revolutionaries of that era. If we consider, for example, Bakunin, it is clear that although with age he talked increasingly of the Russian peasant as the "future progenitor of the revolution" (55), he also toyed constantly

with Western ideas. E.H. Carr reports, for example, that Bakunin remained to the end an Hegelian idealist, and that where he moved beyond Hegel, he was influenced "by the extreme idealist and individualist, Max Stirner" (56). More important still, however, is the fact that Under Western Eyes concerns itself with a Slavophil and Dostoyevskian Russia whilst at the same time purporting to be a novel set in the early years of this century, which demonstrates a crucial defect in Conrad's vision.

In the Author's Note of 1920, Conrad insists that Under Western Eyes was an attempt "to render not so much the political state as the psychology of Russia itself" (p.vii). However, with almost all the characters in the novel actively involved in politics, it is difficult to understand how the politics and the psychology can be separated. Whilst the teacher of languages may be wrong to suggest that Mrs. Haldin's grief results from the workings of some ineluctable political process, at the same time it is undeniable that the tragedy which befalls her is a ramification of the political action that takes place, and thus of the political milieu in which it was fostered. The explanation for Conrad's apparent reluctance to admit that Under Western Eyes is at least as much about politics as it is about psychology, lies in the Russian revolution which seemed to prove incorrect his vision of Russia as we see it in the novel.

In Appendix B, I have attempted to demonstrate that the historical details contained in Under Western Eyes, the clues to its historical setting, make it a very different novel in this respect from The Secret Agent, in which the setting in

time can be very precisely defined. Into the later novel, however, is compressed almost forty-five years of Russian history, from 1861 through to 1905. Thus Eloise Knapp Hay's criticism that there is a weakness in Conrad's "conception of different revolutionary ideas in the Russian history of the period" (57), misses the point. His failure lies not in an inaccurate picture of early twentieth-century Russia (the period of which Hay speaks), but in the fact that his Slavophil, Dostoyevskian Russia is a nineteenth-century image. By grafting onto that image a twentieth-century façade, Conrad implies that he is dealing with an unchanging entity. His is a formula for a nation in stasis, condemned for all eternity to repeat its bloody cycle of reactionary and revolutionary retribution. Under Western Eyes, therefore, is a working out in fiction of the central proposition of "Autocracy and War", that Russia is incapable of moral progress.

In whatever form of upheaval Autocratic Russia is to find her end, it can never be a revolution fruitful of moral consequences to mankind. It cannot be anything else but a rising of slaves. (58)

This idea finds its expression in the novel in Razumov's predicament and personality, for Razumov is a child of Russia and its representative.

"I don't want anyone to claim me. But Russia can't disown me. She cannot!"
Razumov struck his breast with his fist.
"I am it!" (p.209)

Melodramatic, but effective. The implication is that just as Razumov becomes possessed by mysticism, so too does Russia. His exile represents the exile of reason in Russia; his schizophrenia symbolises the institutionalized conflict between the reactionaries and the revolutionaries. Virtually

all the Russians are slaves of mysticism: Mr. de P- ; Ivanovitch; Ziemianitch. Although Razumov, by confessing, escapes the mysticism to which he has fallen prey, he does so only by isolating himself from the struggle, a struggle internalized by the nation as much as by himself. Thus Russia is trapped in her divine mission and divided from the West by her contempt for reason.

Razumov stamped his foot - and under the soft carpet of snow felt the hard ground of Russia, inanimate, cold, inert, like a sullen and tragic mother hiding her face under a winding-sheet - his native soil! (p.33).

The conclusion is inescapable: Mother Russia is a corpse. One might argue that for this reason, Mikulin's dramatic question, "Where to?", takes on a symbolic significance.

If Conrad's vision of Russia was trapped in the nineteenth century, there is evidence to suggest that by 1900, eleven years before Under Western Eyes was published, it was already out of date. By the turn of the century many populist leaders had become convinced that sober reforms designed to improve the economic and political conditions of the peasantry and the proletariat were more urgent goals than dogmatic propagandizing or frenzied preparations for a revolutionary apocalypse. Many of the most influential figures in the marxist movement abandoned it for other things, amongst them Peter Struhve, Sergei Bulgakov and Nicholas Berdayev. In 1909 several of the ex-marxists led by Struhve published a volume of essays entitled Signposts which criticised the old radicalism for concentrating on the destruction of the tsarist regime and for ignoring the impossibility of creating instant perfection to replace it. It called for a commitment to healthy constitutional development. The authors did not

condone or seek to reconcile themselves with autocracy and demanded that rule by arbitrary decree should be superseded by the rule of law (59).

Such developments lie completely beyond the scope of Conrad's view of Russia. In the early years of this century, Slavophilism came increasingly under attack from radicals and reformers who looked to the West for their inspiration. Unquestionably, the establishment of the Duma of 1905-6 was an unambiguous attempt to duplicate Western constitutional systems of government, as was Kerensky's short-lived regime. The revolution itself, of course, was inspired by a political and historical philosophy conceived in the West and under Western conditions; Lenin was not a Slavophile. The term is even less applicable to the Mensheviks who were convinced that Russia lagged behind the West in historical development. All of these developments indicate a breakdown in the simple polarity between revolutionary and reactionary, East and West, which forms the essential substructure of Under Western Eyes. Conrad's vision of a static Russia frozen in the nineteenth century is palpably incorrect.

IV

No analysis of Under Western Eyes would be complete if it failed to consider the nature of and the motives for Razumov's confessions. The difficulty lies in the fact that both his betrayal of Haldin and his confessions are the products of subconscious urges and are thus difficult to reconcile. I argued earlier that Razumov was able to give Haldin up to the authorities because he had lacked a proper moral education. I shall argue now that his experiences in Geneva have the

effect of rectifying the deficiency.

The prime factor in Razumov's re-conversion to the ranks of humanity is of course Nathalie Haldin. In her innocence and her purity she offers to him an example of nobility. A constant reminder of his own weakness and duplicity, she acts rather like a distorting mirror; the more Razumov is forced to direct his gaze upon her, the more he sees his own moral ugliness. Thus, after the event, he begins to develop a sense of guilt, which is heightened by the news of Ziemianitch's suicide. Razumov recognizes the kinship that exists between them, for mysticism had taken over Ziemianitch just as it has control over him. If he could perceive no bond between himself and Haldin, Razumov is indissolubly bound to Ziemianitch. He alone knows the truth about the peasant's suicide and thus the only way to clear the dead man's name is to confess to the revolutionaries.

"I am come here," he began, in a clear voice,
 "to talk of an individual called Ziemianitch..."
 "In justice to that individual, the much ill-used peasant, Ziemianitch, I now declare solemnly that the conclusions of that letter calumniate a man of the people - a bright Russian soul..." (p.365)

It is Nathalie Haldin, however, who makes Razumov conscious of the baseness of his betrayal of her brother and the degradation of his descent into mysticism. In his letter to her he writes,

In giving Victor Haldin up, it was myself, after all, whom I have betrayed most basely. You must believe what I say now, you can't refuse to believe this. Most basely. It is through you that I came to feel this so deeply. (p.361)

Razumov's moral awakening then comes about partly through the vision of truth and beauty which Nathalie represents.

More importantly, however, she is the direct cause of his overpowering need to throw off the mysticism which had gained control over him. "I was given up to evil" (p.359), he says in his letter, and this evil seemed to be leading him towards stealing her soul.

The old man you introduced me to insisted on walking with me. I don't know who he is. He talked of you, of your lonely, helpless state, and every word of that friend of yours was egging me on to the unpardonable sin of stealing a soul. Could he have been the devil himself in the shape of an old Englishman? Natalia Victorovna, I was possessed!" (p.360)

Nathalie, however, has a "pure heart" (p.359), that has "not been touched by evil things" (p.359). In her, there is "no guile, no deception, no falsehood, no suspicion" (p.349); she is a "predestined victim". The sheer ugliness of Razumov's evil intentions, grown in him through the workings of a mystical mode of thought, awaken in him a determination to extricate himself from the increasingly suffocating atmosphere of falsehood which attaches to his position.

You know, Natalia Victorovna, I have the greatest difficulty in saving myself from the superstition of an active providence. It's irresistible...The alternative, of course, would be the personal Devil of our simple ancestors. But, if so, he has overdone it altogether - the old Father of Lies - our national patron - our domestic god, whom we take with us when we go abroad. He has overdone it. (p.350)

Thus, Razumov undergoes what amounts to a moral re-education of the subconscious; he develops a 'conscience' in the normal sense of the word. That inner world which is for Dostoyevsky the realm of truth and harmony, is for Conrad the abode of phantoms, of falsehood and of deception; a world of innate devils, conquerable only through a morality fostered by love

and reason. Thus Razumov cannot shake off his mysticism until he feels instinctively the need for truth in the ordering of his existence. Unable any longer to withstand the "choking fumes of falsehood" which have "taken him by the throat" (p.269), he confesses to the revolutionaries as if he were a deep-sea diver, risking contracting the bends in his desperate need for air. If Raskolnikov confesses to rid himself of reason, Razumov confesses to rid himself of mysticism. His is thus a personal victory for reason and truth.

Under Western Eyes, however, does not end with Razumov's confession. His subsequent treatment at the hands of Nikita and Tekla shows the two sides of Russian nature; the capacity for inflicting pain, and the capacity for enduring it. But if Razumov's exile leaves us with but a tarnished hope for Russia and her people, the very last line, deeply disturbing and ironic as it is, seals the fate of a nation without a future.

"Peter Ivanovitch is an inspired man."

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Richard Curle, The Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad (1928), p.199.
2. 'Typhoon' (Dent), p.3.
3. Ibid., p.25.
4. Ibid., p.4.
5. Ibid., p.19.
6. Jacques Berthoud, Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase (1978), p.163.

7. To name but three: Christopher Cooper, Conrad and the Human Dilemma (1970), New York: Eloise Knapp Hay, The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad (1963), Chicago; Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad (1959)
8. Baines, op.cit., p.362.
9. Frederick R. Karl, Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives (1979), p.185.
10. J.S. Mill, Principles of Political Economy (1909), p.1.
11. N. & J. Mackenzie, The First Fabians (1977), p.85.
12. R.J. Scally, The Origins of the Lloyd George Coalition: The Politics of Social-Imperialism, 1900-1918 (1975), Princeton, p.13.
13. H.G. Wells, The New Machiavelli (1946), p.164.
14. Nostromo (Dent), p.249.
15. Berthoud, op. cit., p.163.
16. A Personal Record (Dent), p.95.
17. I owe this insight to Dr. J.S. McClelland of the University of Nottingham.
18. Edmund Burke, Thoughts on the Causes of the Present Discontents (1770), quoted in B.W. Hill (ed.), Edmund Burke on Government, Politics & Society (1975), p.59.
19. Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), Ibid., p.327.
20. A Personal Record (Dent), p.94.
21. The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' (Dent), p.vii-viii.
22. Ibid., p.13.
23. A Personal Record (Dent), p.xiii.
24. "There was no name in literature that Conrad detested more than that of Dostoyevsky, and usually the mere mention of it drove him into a fury...", Curle, op.cit., p.16.
25. I am not, of course, suggesting that the kind of utilitarianism to which Raskolnikov succumbs is anything more than a crude parody of that ethical system proposed by the English utilitarians, or by their Russian imitators. Dostoyevsky (quite erroneously, I think), took utilitarianism to be opposed to moral imperatives (see Appendix A). But J.S. Mill argues that, on the contrary, moral imperatives are grounded in utilitarian considerations. For example, he takes it for granted that "murder and theft are injurious to human happiness", and that this truth should form the starting-

point from which ethical imperatives may be derived. Putting the matter very simply, Mill might have responded to Dostoyevsky's vision of the utilitarian ethic by pointing out that the universal observance of the principle, "thou shalt not kill", is much more important to the good of all than any amount of good works Raskolnikov could possibly accomplish with his victim's money. Long before Crime and Punishment was written, Mill had already successfully dismissed that particular argument against utilitarianism which is at the core of Dostoyevsky's novel:

We are told that a utilitarian will be apt to make his own particular case an exception to moral rules, and, when under temptation, will see a utility in the breach of a rule, greater than he will see in its observance. But is utility the only creed which is able to furnish us with excuses for evil doing, and means of cheating our own conscience? They are afforded in abundance by all doctrines which recognize as a fact in morals the existence of conflicting considerations; which all doctrines do, that have been believed by sane persons. ...There is no ethical creed which does not temper the rigidity of its laws, by giving a certain latitude, under the moral responsibility of the agent, for accomodation to peculiarities of circumstances; and under every creed, at the opening thus made, self-deception and dishonest casuistry get in.

'Utilitarianism', Chapter 2, in J.S. Mill, Utilitarianism, On Liberty, and Considerations on Representative Government (1910)

26. This is the passage:

How it happened he did not know, but suddenly something seemed to seize him and throw him at her feet. He embraced her knees and wept. At first she was terribly frightened, and her face was covered by a deathly pallor. She jumped to her feet and, trembling all over, looked at him. But at once and at the same moment she understood everything. Her eyes shone with intense happiness; she understood, and she had no doubts at all about it, that he loved her, loved her infinitely, and that the moment she had waited for so long had come at last.

They wanted to speak, but could not; tears stood in their eyes. They were both pale and thin; but in those sick and pale faces the dawn of a new future, of a full resurrection to a new life, was already shining...

Crime and Punishment (1951), trans. D. Magarshack.

27. Ibid., p.109.

28. Ibid., p.184.

29. Berthoud, op. cit., p.184.

30. J.P. Nettl, The Soviet Achievement (1967), p.15.

31. Lionel Kochan, The Making of Modern Russia (1963), p.152.

32. Ibid., p.152.

33. Ibid., p.153.
34. Robert F. Byrnes, Pobedonostsev: His Life and Thought (1968), Bloomington, Indiana, p.316.
35. Ibid., p.105.
36. Alexander Herzen, The Russian People and Socialism - An Open Letter to Jules Michelet, English trans., 1956. Quoted in Kochan, op. cit., P.154.
37. George Woodcock, Anarchism (1963), p.381.
38. Herzen describes them as "the small, dirty milieu of petty bourgeoisie which covered all France like green slime". Quoted in Kochan, op. cit., p.154.
39. A pencil sketch of Pobedonostsev illustrative of what I mean can be found in Theofanis George Stavrou (ed.), Russia Under the Last Tsar (1969), Minnesota.
40. Kochan, op. cit., p.192.
41. Ibid., p.155.
42. Berthoud, op. cit., p.165.
43. Ibid., p.164.
44. Isaiah Berlin, Russian Thinkers (1979), p.137.
45. Ibid.
46. Avrom Fleishman, Conrad's Politics (1967), Baltimore, p.228.
47. Ibid., p.231.
48. It is difficult to support my argument here without an unwarrantably extensive description of de Maistre's thinking, but some idea of his view of Rousseau's relationship with the violence of the Revolution, may be gleaned from the following passage:
 What does it matter to me that the weak, timid, and reticent Rousseau never had a wish or the power to stir up revolt?...Once [he] put forward maxims capable of spawning every crime, these crimes are [his] work, since the criminals are [his] disciples...The tiger that rips men open is following his nature; the real criminal is the man who unmuzzles him and launches him on society.
 Jack Lively (ed.), The Works of Joseph de Maistre (1965), p.111-2.
49. H.A.L. Fisher, A History of Europe (1936), p.1006.
50. Nettl, op.cit., p.19.
51. Kochan, op. cit., p.213

52. Byrnes, op.cit., p.104.

53. Several commentators have spotted the similarities in the titles, amongst them Eloise Knapp Hay (op.cit., p.284), who reports:

In the manuscript there are four: Peter Ivanovitch's Resurrection of Yegor for Tolstoy's Resurrection, The Prince of Darkness for Tolstoy's play The Power of Darkness, The Pfennig Cantata for The Kreutzer Sonata, and The Parables of Decay, which is a slur apparently at Tolstoy's late parables Work, Death and Sickness.

Significantly, Tolstoy shared many of the Populist (Narodnik) assumptions of his day, including the dismissal of reason and an inclination towards the "inspirational" mode of thinking. Berlin (op.cit., p.251), notes that Tolstoy was convinced

...that to plan, organise, rely on science, try to create rational patterns of life in accordance with rational theories, is to swim against the stream of nature, to close one's eyes to the saving truth within us, to torture facts to fit artificial schemata, and torture human beings to fit social and economic systems against which their natures cry out. From the same source, too, comes the obverse of this; Tolstoy's faith in an intuitively grasped direction of things as not merely inevitable, but objectively- providentially - good.

54. Cooper, op. cit., p.75.

55. Kochan, op. cit., p.154.

56. E.H. Carr, Michael Bakunin (1937), p.434. Carr also comments that Bakunin was inclined to accept Rousseau's hypothesis that "man, if unperturbed by social or political authority is inherently virtuous" (p.435). Importantly, and rather like Conrad himself, Bakunin was always something of an internationalist. Although Russian revolutionary émigrés were often as slavophil in their views as their reactionary counterparts at home, the circumstances of their lives in exile, often dependent on the support of the international revolutionary community, made it virtually impossible for them to develop the degree of hostility to the West common in Russia itself.

57. Hay, op. cit., p.278.

58. Notes on Life and Letters (Dent), p.102.

59. Donald W. Treadgold, "Russian Radical Thought 1894-1917", in Stavrou, op. cit., pp.84-85.

Appendix A

Raskolnikov's hat

I shall confine myself to a brief discussion of Raskolnikov's motivation for murdering the old money-lender, against the background of the social and political ideas evident in the novel. There are, I think, two clear motives behind Raskolnikov's crime. First, the desire to demonstrate, most of all to himself, that he is a "Napoleon", a higher mortal; which is all bound up with some notion of destiny. Second, the purely utilitarian moral ethic of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Let us take the latter motive first.

The theory behind the idea is given its best enunciation by the unknown student whom Raskolnikov overhears in the café talking to an army officer.

"...on the one hand, we have a stupid, senseless, worthless, wicked, and decrepit old hag, who is no use to anybody and who actually does harm to everybody..."

"...On the other hand, we have a large number of young and promising people who are going to rack and ruin without anyone lifting a finger to help them - and there are thousands of them all over the place...Hundreds, perhaps thousands of lives could be saved, dozens of families could be rescued from a life of poverty, from decay and ruin, from vice and hospitals for venereal diseases - and all with her money. Kill her, take the money, and with its help devote yourself to the service of humanity and the good of all... One death in exchange for a hundred lives - why, it's a simple sum in arithmetic!" (p.84)

This is plainly an argument for the utilitarian ethic - the greatest happiness of the greatest number. This well known argument, of course, stemmed not from Russia but from France and England. It was first put forward by the Frenchman Helvétius and was later taken up by the English Utilitarians under Bentham and Mill (though in a more sophisticated form).

Helvétius saw good and bad, right and wrong, in terms of the simple dichotomy between pleasure and pain. Proper moral conduct thus consists of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. Goodness, given these assumptions, becomes, as the anonymous student says, "a simple sum in arithmetic".

The utilitarian ethic, therefore, justifies, or seems to justify, the murder of the old money-lender. The fact that Raskolnikov has to kill the much more worthy Lizaveta in order to escape detection is of little consequence; his kind of utilitarian argument is no respecter of persons.

I will now make an attempt at the second motive for the crime; the so-called 'Napoleon' motive. Raskolnikov himself explains it to the examining magistrate, Porfiry Petrovich.

"...the 'extraordinary' man has a right - not an officially sanctioned right, of course - to permit his conscience to step over certain obstacles, but only if it is absolutely necessary for the fulfilment of his ideas on which quite possibly the welfare of mankind may depend." (p.276).

Raskolnikov characterizes the 'extraordinaries' or 'Napoleons' by saying that "mostly", they "demand in proclamations of one kind or another, the destruction of the present in the name of a better future" (p.277). These criminals are, therefore, revolutionaries. Raskolnikov, in the service of his "idea", the utilitarian idea, needs to "step over" the normal moral boundaries.

In a letter to Katkov of September 1865, Dostoyevsky wrote that Crime and Punishment would be "a novel of contemporary life and the action takes place this year. A young man, a former student of Petersburg University who is very hard up, becomes obsessed with the "half-baked" ideas that are in the air just now..." Significantly, by 1865, there had been a

shift in some sectors of the Russian radical intelligentsia away from the old Utopian Socialism towards an extreme form of elitism which stressed the right of a superior individual to act independently for the good of humanity. In this, the 'Nihilists' led by Dimitri Pisarev, were influenced by German Romanticism and particularly by Hegel.

Whereas the enlightenment had seen history and reason as mutually antagonistic, Hegel attempted to re-unite them within a single framework. For him, history was the Idea, the Absolute, working itself out in the world. It was, therefore, both rational and pre-determined; history inexorably developed according to the dictates of the dialectic. Hegel's "world historical man" was an individual destined to play an important role in the progress of history. The Idea is the only beautiful, rational and true thing and, since history is the Idea working itself out, history cannot be irrational. Since he is an instrument in this process, a "world historical man" cannot be 'wrong' in his actions, even though he may have to "step over" the limits of conventional morality.

When we examine Raskolnikov's 'Napoleon' motive in this light, the 'coincidences' of his over-hearing the student's utilitarian argument, his over-hearing that Lizaveta will be away at a certain time, and so on, are not coincidences at all, but the call of destiny. This explains why Raskolnikov seems impelled to murder the old woman. He is snared by an illusion of destiny.

These ideas, then, are dangerous notions of a Western European origin. One is seen as fundamentally English, the other as fundamentally German. In this lies the symbolic importance of Raskolnikov's hat. Razumikhin calls it a

"Palmerston" hat (p.148), and a drunkard in the street calls out to Raskolnikov, "Hey, you there, German hatter" (p.21). His hat is at the same time German (Hegelian) and English (Benthamite).

"Half-baked", foreign ideas subvert the true Russian within Raskolnikov. His 'natural' inclinations are morally sound, as in the scene in which he gives twenty copecks to a policeman to find a cab for a young girl who has been raped and is in danger of a second molestation. His pity and his generosity show in this act, but it is followed by a reversion to his perverted rational self:

At that moment something seemed to sting Raskolnikov; in an instant he became quite a different man.

'I say! Hey, there!' he shouted after the policeman with the moustache.

The policeman turned round.

'Leave them alone! It's none of your business! let them be! Let him' - he pointed at the smartly dressed gentleman - 'have his fun! what do you care?' (p.68)

In such a manner does Dostoyevsky seek to portray the evil that is Western, atheistic rationalism.

Note: All quotations are from the Penguin edition of Crime and Punishment (1951), translated by David Magarshack.

Appendix B

The purpose of this appendix is to set down the clues to the historical setting of Under Western Eyes. This will show that the historical details contained in the novel indicate that Conrad had no precise period of Russian history in mind, but wished, at least, to give it the appearance of a modern account.

1. Eloise Knapp Hay (The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad, P.269), claims that Haldin's assassination of Mr. de P- is modelled on the assassination of the Russian Minister of the Interior, "de Plehve", in 1904. She further insists that Haldin was "frankly modelled" on Ygor Sazonov, de Plehve's assassin. Although she offers no evidence to support these assertions, and although there is some doubt about the name of the Minister of the Interior - some historians call him simply "Plehve", whilst Robert F. Byrnes (Pobedonostsev, p.240) gives his full name as "Viachezslav K. Von Plehve" - there seems little doubt that Mr. de P- is a derivation from Plehve; thus setting the novel in 1904.

2. Avrom Fleishman (Conrad's Politics, p.219), points out that the details of the assassination in the novel are taken from the assassination of Alexander II in 1882, and not from Plehve's in 1904 which occurred under different circumstances. He adds that "It would have required some sophistication to know that the betrayer of the assassins of Alexander II was one of their own number, Rysakov, whose name resembles that of the novel's hero."

3. Several commentators have mentioned the similarity between the fictional double-agent Nikita, and the real-life

agent-provocateur Evno Azoff. The incident in which Mikulin discloses the duplicity of Nikita to Ivanovitch whilst they are travelling together in a railway carriage outside Russia, appears to have been based on a similar interview between A.A. Lopuchin, a chief of the Ochrana, and the revolutionary leader Vladimir Burtsev, who were thrown together on a German train. Lopuchin revealed on that occasion that Evno Azoff was a police spy. Both the fictional and the historical spy chiefs were demoted and exiled for their indiscretions. According to Fleishman (pp.219-220), Conrad came across the information in an article, "The Russian Spy System: the Azoff Scandals in Russia", signed "D.S.", which appeared in the English Review (1,816-32). This incident would place the setting of the novel at or round about 1905.

4. Fleishman reports that Peter Ivanovitch is "elaborately patterned" after Michael Bakunin who "had been a dissolute aristocratic youth and repentent convert to revolution; an escapee from imprisonment whose route went Eastwards across Siberia; a populist, nihilist, and elitist; a man who idealized womankind and lived largely on the contributions of his followers" (p.219). If we assume that Ivanovitch is partly modelled on Bakunin we can date fairly precisely the period in which the events of Under Western Eyes are set. Bakunin made his famous escape from Siberia in 1861 and he died in Switzerland on 1st July 1876; thus placing the action between 1861 and 1876. An even more precise date within this time-span may be ascertained if we take it that the intrigue planned for the Balkans in Ivanovitch's flat is modelled on the abortive naval expedition to support the Polish revolt which was led by Bakunin in 1863.

5. Haldin tells Razumov that his mother's eldest brother had been shot in '28, "Under Nicholas you know" (p.23). Suppose we assume that Haldin's uncle had been only twenty when he was executed, and ten years older than Haldin's mother. If we assume also that she gave birth to the future assassin of Mr. de P- when she was forty (a very great age for childbirth in nineteenth-century Russia), ie., in 1858; then in 1904 at the time of Plehve's assassination, Haldin would have been forty-six years old. In the novel, however, Haldin is a young man. This detail, then, suggests a setting for the novel significantly earlier than 1900.

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General Note: In order not to inflate this bibliography, I have cited only such works as have had some share in directing the course of my argument. The place of publication is only given when not London. The date is of the edition I have used; where this is not the first edition, the date of such is also given.

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